

1897

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R. H. Smith

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To Miss E. St Hill

with kindest regards.

& Remembrance of
many kindnesses during
a residence of over
5 years at 41 Gloucester

Wm. Fales
Nov 2/98

The Land o' the Leal



The Land o' the Leal

By David Lyall

Seventh Thousand

LONDON

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1897

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*There is a land, of every land the pride,
Beloved by Heaven o'er all the world beside ;*

*There is a spot of earth supremely blest,
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest ;*

*Oh ! thou shalt find, howe'er thy footsteps roam,
That land thy country, and that spot thy home.'*



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A WASTREL

A



A WASTREL

ABOUT four o'clock on a winter afternoon a middle-aged country-woman alighted from a south-coming train in the Waverley Station at Edinburgh; and after looking about her with a slight expectancy, for which she immediately rebuked herself, walked briskly towards the long, weary ascent of steps leading up to Princes Street. She was a somewhat striking figure among many that were commonplace, her attire and appearance being foreign to city streets, and a little out of place thereon. She was very tall, and carried herself erectly, and with a certain dignity and grace of the more rugged order. Her gown was of stone-grey alpaca, fully fashioned, the bodice gathered at the waist; on the breast a white lawn neckerchief was held in soft folds by a large brooch composed of hair cunningly intertwined, and set in massive gold. It was

not a beautiful ornament, but it was more precious than rubies to the woman who wore it. Each tiny lock she had removed with her own hands from the heads of those she loved, and whom God had taken; and the wearing of that simple memento comforted her, giving to her wounded heart some nearness to those who had gone away. An ample cloak of black woollen material, plainly made, hung well over her gown, and her bonnet was of black lace with a lilac flower, and old-fashioned lappets tied over the ears. She had a basket on her arm, such as is used for carrying market produce in the country, and she was not ashamed of it, though it provoked a smile on some lips as she passed. She was serenely unconscious of scrutiny or criticism, and moved like a person whose position is assured, and who therefore can be careless of vulgar comment. The face, if of a homely type, was yet striking in its way, by reason of its fresh, ruddy, wholesome colour, and its serene and beautiful expression. Strength, sweetness, and absolute sincerity were marked on every feature; seen even in a crowd, it was a face to be noted and remembered. It wore at that moment a singularly troubled look; indeed,

anxiety of the cruellest and most withering sort was gnawing at the woman's heart. Arrived, somewhat breathless after the long ascent, she looked about her in a half-troubled way, which attracted the attention of a well-disposed policeman, who had his eye on sundry imps who were selling vestas and papers, and otherwise doing their best to hinder and annoy passengers going to and from the station.

'Can I dae onything for ye, mistress?' he inquired, and the kindly word brought a sudden smile to her face, which the man long remembered.

'Maybe ye could direck me, my man, to Drumphail Street. I'm seekin' the hoose o' the Reverend Neil Denham, Free Kirk minister there. D'ye happen to ken it?'

'I ken Drumphail Street; it's easy to get; keep richt doon frae St. Andrew's Square, an' onybody'll tell ye.'

'Thenk ye kindly.'

She picked her way at a little trot across the muddy street. It had been a wet, miserable morning, and even yet the nipping air and leaden sky threatened more rain. The policeman watched to see that she took the right turn-

ing, and he continued to speculate about her till something else occurred to arrest his attention. The woman continued her course somewhat dully, as if not interested in what she saw. A close observer would have detected in her a gradually increasing nervousness as she approached her destination. It was visible in the number of times she changed her basket from one arm to another, and in a curious twitching of the generally firm, well-balanced mouth. At length she reached the house, a plain, unpretentious family abode, where the shining brasses and the spotless white curtains spoke of the careful and capable housewife. A neat but very young servant opened the door, and when asked for Mrs. Denham, replied that her mistress was in, though just going out.

Mrs. Denham herself, hearing the voice, came out of the dining-room, and at sight of the figure on the doorstep gave a little cry.

‘Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie Gray, is it really you?’

There was a little catch, almost like a sob, in her breath, and she caught the stranger by her two hands and drew her within the door. There was no doubt about that welcome; it came

straight and warm and sweet from the heart of the minister's wife.

'Yes, it's me, Mary, and fell gled am I to see a kent face.'

'Neil is out; I was just going myself to a Zenana meeting in Melville Street, but I'll send Nellie with a note of apology. Come in, come in.'

She drew her into the warm, cosy, firelit study, and setting her down in the minister's own chair, unfastened her cloak and her bonnet-strings with kindly hands. In all this there was a nervous haste of movement which indicated some deeper feeling than surprise and joy over an unexpected meeting with an old and dear friend. Mrs. Denham was a little plump woman, with a neat, well-developed figure, a round, chubby, sensible face, merry eyes, and wavy black hair, a pleasant person to look at, and still pleasanter to know.

'Dinna bide frae your meetin' for me, Mary,' Mrs. Gray protested. 'I only want a rest and a cup o' tea; that the maid can gie me. Then I maun to Archibald Place to see Bob.'

'If you think I am going to leave you like this, you're mistaken, that's all,' said Mrs. Denham promptly. 'Why, Lizzie, Lizzie Gray, do you

know this is positively the first time I've had you in my very own house, and am I going to set you aside like a stranger? Not likely !'

'I wudna hae been here the day, Mary, but for the letter ye wrote. I got it this morning.'

Mrs. Denham's lips twitched. 'Very well she knew what had brought her friend to Edinburgh.

'I never had a harder task than to write that letter, Lizzie; but we'll talk about it after. How's Mr. Gray?'

'He's weel. He was awa to Tam Cairns's roup at Pittencree afore the postman cam this mornin', an' it was as weel. Noo tell me hoo long it is sin' ye suspeckit first that Bob was gettin' into ill company.'

She folded her hands in her lap and looked very straightly into Mary Denham's face, and her eyes had the hunger of an anxious mother's heart in them.

'Well, to tell you the truth, we were very anxious last winter, and towards the end of the session he came very little to our house. He has only been once since this session opened, and then he looked rather out of sorts. But it was things Neil heard outside that vexed us most; and after

thinking over it long and praying, we decided to write.'

'It was a Christian act. What things did Mr. Denham hear outside?'

Mrs. Denham was not surprised at the question. She had not known Elizabeth Gray all her days for nothing. The whole truth, and nothing but the truth, would satisfy that brave, sincere, and well-balanced mind.

'A good deal, dear ; but you mustn't lay it too much to heart. Bad companions are at the bottom of it. He's lodging with a very dissipated, idle fellow, who has led him off his feet. You know what Bob is, how warm-hearted and generous, and full of fun. Then he is so fond of you. I am sure, after you have had a talk with him, he'll mend. That's why Neil and I thought we'd better write, for, of course, he resented what we said.'

'Ye have spoken, then?'

'O yes, a good many times,' said Mary, colouring a little. 'You did not expect we would look on at a lad we loved drifting so sadly without trying to help him? Mr. Denham paid a fine for him at the police-court last Monday morning.'

Ashen pale grew the face of Elizabeth Gray, and her strong hands trembled on her knee.

A fine! What for?'

'He had been at the theatre Saturday night, and had taken too much drink, and there was a row in the gallery. Several youths were apprehended, Bob among them, though I believe he had nothing to do with it. He was locked up over Sunday, and fined on Monday morning at the court.'

It cost Mrs. Denham no small effort to state these unvarnished facts, but she knew the woman with whom she had to deal.

'I was in the kirk on the Sabbath-day jalousing naethin', Mary,' she said, with a wan, wintry smile. 'And my ain bairn in the jail! Ye are best aff the day that has nae bairn, guid or bad.'

Mrs. Denham got up and knelt on the hearth-rug before her friend, looking up into her drawn face, her eyes wet with sympathetic tears.

'Lizzie, don't give up. You'll save Bob yet. *Your* son will never be a castaway.'

She shook her head, and sank wearily back in the chair.

'I hae been uplifted, Mary, because my lad had

mair pairts than the lave. It is the Lord's way o' rebukin' sinfu' pride.'

'No such thing,' contradicted the minister's bright little wife. 'I know enough of theology to contradict that. Just wait till Neil comes in, and he'll set you straight on that point.'

'I think I'll no wait, Mary. I'll gang ower afore darkenin' an' see Bob; I'll see Mr. Denham at nicht, if it be convenient for me to sleep here.'

Mrs. Denham looked sorrowfully at her friend. This meek, half-apologetic demeanour was so unlike Lisbeth Gray's ordinary bearing that it troubled her.

'Wouldn't you like Neil to go with you, or me? I could wait outside.'

'No, I'd readier be mysel', Mary; ye needna fret. I'll no get lost.'

'Oh, I'm not afraid of that; it's after five now, and quite dark. Shall I send for a cab?'

'If ye wad. I'm tired, Mary, an' the streets confuse me.—Yes, I'll tak a cab.'

So uneasy did Mrs. Denham feel after she had watched the cab drive away, that she was thankful for her husband's return about six o'clock.

He came into the study flushed with his brisk

walk from the old town ; but directly he sat down the treacherous colour faded. His face was too pale for health or comeliness, though the features were very fine and regular, his black eyes liquid and keen. It was the face of a student, the brow indicating intellectual gifts of the highest order. He was a power in the pulpit to which he had been called, and one of the shining lights of the Church to which he belonged. His ministry was valuable, it was said, especially to the young, and he had a great following of young men at all his services. He had the reticent manner and undemonstrative demeanour of the student, and he did not make a companion of his wife ; yet they were happy enough, and she content. The happy-hearted, sound-minded little country-woman had set him on a pedestal, and worshipped him perhaps a little too far off. In her eyes his character was without a flaw.

‘Oh, Neil,’ she cried breathlessly, ‘Lizzie is here — Mrs. Gray, I mean — and she has gone away over to see Bob.’

‘Well, and what does she say ? Did your letter give the shock we feared ?’

‘Well, I hardly know. She has got a heavy blow,

of course,—any one can see that, but somehow I don't think she was so surprised as we thought. Not want any tea? Have you had it?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

'At Mrs. Hamilton's,' he answered. 'I met her just as we left the hall. She was driving. Macmillan was with me, and she took us both back to tea.'

'Oh, that was very nice. I'm worried about poor Lizzie, and I hope Bob won't behave badly to her. I have forebodings. He is fit for anything. I told her about the fine, because I wanted her to have some idea of how bad he really is.'

'It was wise perhaps,' replied the minister, but his tone betrayed a waning interest. 'Mrs. Hamilton said you were not at the meeting.'

'No. I couldn't leave Lizzie, of course. I never saw such a man as you — a perfect wizard; you hear everything outside.' She spoke merrily and archly, and a slight smile quivered round her bonnie mouth.

Meanwhile the heavy four-wheeled cab trundled slowly up the steep ascent from the north side to

Archibald Place. Six o'clock pealed from St. Giles' as Mrs. Gray alighted from it. She paid the cabman and dismissed him, expecting to be an hour or two with her boy. He lived in the top flat of one of the highest houses, but his mother climbed bravely up, though she leaned up against the wall to recover her breath before she rang the bell. A girl of fourteen opened the door, and signified that Robert Gray was within.

'I'm his mother; ye needna tell him,' said Mrs. Gray, remembering the day she had brought him first to his lodgings, much concerned for his bodily welfare therein. The sitting-room opened off the lobby, directly opposite the outer door. Mrs. Gray put her umbrella on the stand and walked in without any preliminary knock, expecting to find Bob at his tea, or maybe at his books. The room was well lighted by a threefold gasalier, but the air was thick with tobacco smoke. A round table stood in the middle, and three young men sat at it playing cards. A whisky bottle stood suggestively on the little chiffonier; one of the lads had a tumbler of whisky and water at his elbow. It was a striking scene, and the face of one was a study. He was a big, ruddy-faced

chap, more like a farmer than a student, and his face could not be said to look particularly pleasant at the moment.

‘Hulloa, mother!’ he said gruffly. ‘What brings you here? Why can’t they come in decently and say I am wanted?’

Mrs. Gray looked round her dazedly. Anger, disgust, confusion, were on her son’s face and in his voice. His two comrades winked to each other, and one rose.

‘We’d better shove, Jimmy,’ said one.

‘No, you needn’t; sit down,’ said Bob Gray, still angrily, and eyeing the homely figure of his mother with shame. Never had she looked more like her own dairy and farmyard; he could not see beyond the short, quaint gown, the clumsy cloak, the bonnet of last year’s pattern.

‘Come into the bedroom a minute. Excuse me, boys; I won’t keep you. Just go on till I come back.’

He took his mother with no particular gentleness by the arm, and banged the door. Opening an adjoining one, he led her in.

‘When did you come?’ he asked, more courteously. ‘Why didn’t you write, and I’d have been ready for you? Of course you think

it's awful to see these fellows. It's only Farquhar—he's Lord Cobham's nephew, and lodges downstairs; and we weren't playing for money' (which was a lie). 'Won't you sit down?'

Mrs. Gray sat down, but her tongue was not loosed. Her son regarded her uneasily. At home the silence of the mistress of Stanerigg was much more regarded than her speech.

'Where are you staying?—At the Denhams', I suppose; and they've been stuffing you with lies about me. He's a sneak, always watching me. I couldn't stand it, really; but if he's been at it again, I'll be even with him.'

'Wheesht!'

The sound was so sharp and so full of intolerable anguish, that he looked at her guiltily. Once he had adored his mother; but now she stood to him in the light of a judge and an avenger, to be conciliated and pacified at any cost, but not beloved.

'I'll tell you what, I'll go and shunt these fellows, and then we can have a jolly good talk. I'm sure I can make everything straight to you, if you'll only take my word, and not that of that canting sneak Denham. Ugh, I can't stand him at any price.'

Delighted with his own cleverness at seeing a way out of the dilemma, he abruptly left the room. No sooner had his mother heard the closing of the second door than she rose, and with great haste slipped out into the lobby, took up her umbrella, and left the house, hastening down the stairs as if pursued. She chose a different way, which brought her out into the green, open space of the Meadows, and there, under a tree, she found a seat. Her limbs were trembling, her whole body felt numb and weak. She was glad to sink down and to rest there till some strength should return to her. The chill mists of the day had disappeared, and the sky was now soft and clear above her as in April. Many stars were shining, and a young, faint moon showing shyly behind the ghostly branches of the trees. She was away from the din, peace was round about her, everywhere save within. She had seen, ay, and fully understood, the look in the eyes of the boy she had nursed at her breast, who had been the child of many prayers. She was but a plain country woman, but her eyes were sharpened to keenness, her judgment did not err.

The great buttresses of the Infirmary stood

out behind the gaunt trees, and she wondered vaguely whether any within suffered as keenly as she. Last night she had gone to her bed a happy mother, praying for her son ere she slept, the son she had dedicated from his birth to the service of the Lord.

And, lo, he was a castaway !

For the moment hope had folded her wings afar, and had no message for that stricken soul. She sat a long time, unconscious of the chill evening air, of the scrutiny of the chance passers-by, who knew not that a human soul near them was passing its first hour in Gethsemane.

Her thoughts, ever inclined Godward, took comfort after long numbness in certain words of the Book she loved.

‘Peter went out and denied Him thrice.’ So her son, not by word, but by his look, had denied her.

A strange, sweet sense of kinship with the crucified but now risen Saviour fell upon her wounded heart like balm, and prayer became once more possible to her.

These were the words of her prayer : ‘Lord, if I be na unworthy, gie me the bairn’s soul, an’ show me the way to win it, for Jesus’ sake.’

REDEEMED

REDEEMED

MRS. GRAY went home next day, which was Saturday. An anxious mother had undertaken the journey from Faulds ; a hopeless one returned. She had made no further attempt to see her son ; and he arrived at the Denhams' house to find that she had left by the forenoon train. Her chief concern was to get back to the peace of her own home, to find in familiar things some solace for her hurt. From the boy's father she expected no sympathy. His condemnation would be swift, relentless, and severe.

And yet she longed to tell him, and so share her pain. She had said so little to the Denhams that they really knew nothing of what had happened. It was high noon when she stepped out at the wayside station and climbed the hilly street of the little village. It was ugly, yet not unpicturesque, and the landscape round, sylvan and

lovely, redeemed it from the commonplace. She remembered that it was Saturday, and gave some orders at the shops, answering the neighbourly queries with calm unconcern, and then set out to walk to her home. The distance was three miles, and the road uphill all the way. But a black frost held the ground firmly, and walking was smooth and easy. The mistress of Stanerigg was strong and active; a three-mile walk was nothing to her. Nay, she was glad of it that bitter day; it gave her space, quiet, room to breathe. She thought of many things as she walked, but mostly of the days when Bob had been a little chap, or a bairn at her breast. Vividly before her was that June day when they had driven the old mare, then in the pride of her days, proudly in a new gig to the parish kirk for the christening.

Between the black hedgerows she trudged steadily, her mouth kept sternly shut to still its pitiful quiver; and when she turned in at the gate and saw her own home set on a hill, the faint wintry sunshine making some radiance on the windows, the tears rolled down her cheeks. It was now half-past one, and the farmer of Stanerigg, having had his early dinner, turned out to

the stables to see the horses yoked to the plough. Recognising the solitary figure far down the road, he set out to meet it with a certain curiosity, not unmingled with apprehension. When he returned from the Pittencree roup at darkening the previous day, he had been told by the maid that his wife had gone to Edinburgh on account of a letter she had received from Mrs. Denham. He had not connected this in any way with his son, and it was only now that a vague foreboding visited him. He met her about a hundred yards from the wicket gate which led through the little wood to the house; and he saw that she was wearied and troubled in her mind.

‘Ye’re tired, Lisbeth,’ he said, taking her basket, now much lightened. ‘What for did ye no hire frae Geordie Allan? It wasna for you walkin’ a’ the way up—perfectly needless, as ye ken.’

‘I wantit to walk,’ she said, and her eyes regarded him with a strange yearning, which puzzled him.

Robert Gray was a large, strong, sinewy person, with a long, big-featured face, grey whiskers, and a clean-shaven chin, which showed strength of

character and an indomitable will. Uprightness, honesty of purpose, absolute integrity were written on his face, but it lacked the softer outline ; in his nature, indeed, tenderness had little part.

‘What took ye awa sae sudden?’ he asked.
‘Is Mrs. Denham no weel?’

‘They’re baith weel ; wait or we get in, faither, and I’ll tell ye what took me.’

He opened the wicket gate for her silently, and they passed through into the shadow of the wood. The trees were quite bare, and there was a soughing wind through them, only heard in the month of November. Those who have lived long near the heart of nature can discern all the wind voices, and know the tone, which changes with each season.

Stanerigg, belying its name, stood snugly in the shelter of this wood, but was open in front, a grassy lawn sloping to a high thorn-hedge which bounded its fields, now all upturned by the plough. A wide span of open country, rich, fertile, and diversified, stretched towards the sea, forming one of the most beautiful prospects and one of the richest agricultural districts in the south of Scotland. Stanerigg had been tenanted

by the Grays, father and son, for three generations, and their name was held in high honour for integrity and for skill in their own calling, Robert Gray being an authority in all agricultural matters.

It was a pleasant family house, roomy, substantial, well-cared-for without and within. The living-room was furnished in polished mahogany of Chippendale date, and the sideboard adorned by a good deal of massive silver plate, kept in a high state of polish. Mrs. Gray gave a little sigh of content as she entered the room and sat down at the window. Her husband put down her basket, and sitting on the edge of the table, waited for her to speak.

‘I thocht it better to leave nae ill word behind, an’ to see what was what, Robert; an’ I hae seen. I keep naethin’ back. It was Bob Mary wrote aboot. He has cast in his lot wi’ evil-doers.’

‘Has he?’ Stanerigg spoke rather quietly, but the darkness gathered in his eyes. Then his wife, without varnish or preamble, told him the whole tale. A mother more indulgent and less just would have sought to gloss over the lad’s weakness: no such thought occurred to her. She

knew her husband well, that he had no quarter for the evil-doer ; but he was the lad's father, and therefore entitled to know everything. He received it quietly, making no sign that he likewise had received a fearful blow.

'He maun come hame, Lisbeth,' he said, 'an' work on the land. Three months at the ploo an' the harries wull maybe ca' the devilry oot o' him. Ye never saw him the day, then?'

She shook her head.

'No ; but he'll come or write. Yes, you're richt, he maun come hame. Ye were richt afore, faither ; he should never ha' gane awa'. It taks a special grace to be a minister. I see that in Neil Denham that wull never be in oor Bob. But the Lord kens I was fain to see him in His service.'

She smiled wanly, and rose rather weakly to her feet. Now that she was home and had told her tale, her strength had gone away, even as it had gone the night before. She could not bear any more.

'Faither, when he comes ye'll be canny wi' him,' she said, with a great wistfulness. 'He has been tempted, an' maybe we set him oot ower

young, and withoot tellin' him o' the ill he micht meet.'

'He maun be made to feel the brunt o't, Lisbeth,' he said doggedly. 'I'll think ower't, but he maun come hame.'

It did not occur to the man, who would cheerfully have given his own life for his wife any day, to offer her a word of sympathy or tenderness to support her breaking heart. In this he did not greatly disappoint her, for she knew what to expect; and when he passed out she went up to her own room, and shutting the door, laid herself down on the bed. And with her face turned to the wall, she prayed until God answered her by sleep. Her night in Edinburgh had been quite sleepless; now body and mind claimed some respite from the long strain put upon them. She was awakened by an unusual sound, and sprang up astonished to find her room in darkness, and puzzled for the moment to remember how she came to be lying on her bed in the daytime in her outdoor clothes. Her faithful house-girl, Ailie Dyer, had looked in twice in the course of the afternoon, feeling that something had gone seriously wrong to put her mistress so far out of

her usual way. But finding her each time fast asleep, she had slipped away. The room was above the dining-room, and the sound which awakened Mrs. Gray was the raised tone of her husband's voice. Instantly everything became clear to her. Bob had come home, and his father was calling him to task for his misdeeds. The instinct to protect her own, made her spring up, throw open the door, and run downstairs. Her dress was disarranged, her hair dishevelled, her face flushed with sleep; but she could not wait to remedy these things. She knew the hot temper of both; perhaps even before she could intervene words might be spoken which would never be healed this side the grave.

They were silent as she entered the room. Stanerigg stood upon the hearthrug, and his hands were clasped behind his back. Bob leaned against the sideboard with his hands thrust indifferently into his pockets, his lips pursed into a defiant whistle. He winced at sight of his mother.

'He's here, mother, an' a bonnie cuif he is,' observed Stanerigg, with the exceeding dryness of deep, still anger. 'Look at him. There's no

muckle sense o' sin there. My lord thinks we're makin' a to-do about naething.'

She looked from one to another pitifully, seeing the warring elements in both pitted against each other, and knowing how serious were the issues at stake.

She stepped over and laid her hand with a lightly imploring touch on her husband's arm.

'Leave him to me, faither, just a wee. I'm his mither. God teaches mithers whiles when He leaves ithers i' the dark. Leave him to me.'

Stanerigg gave a little snort. He was a hard man, but his love for his one son had been a deep-seated, idolatrous affection, largely mingled with personal vanity and pride. He was fine-looking, and his gifts were certainly high, but most of all his father had boasted of his character and his uprightness of life, scoffing at the idea that student life was specially trying, and that temptations such as he did not dream of lie in wait for the unwary at every turn. So we judge harshly often where we do not know, and then the time comes when we would remedy our error, and that tenderly, but it is too late.

'Ye'll stop at hame, my man, an' try what the

land can dae for ye,' he said, with grim decision. 'An' ye'll dae your day's darg, yokin' wi' the rest at daylight an' workin' till darkenin'. It'll set ye a heap better nor playin' cairds an' drinkin' whisky wi' a set o' idlers i' the toon.'

Having thus delivered himself, Stanerigg retired, dimly conscious in the midst of his bitter pain that his rebuke had made but small impression, and that his wife possessed some secret knowledge which would make whatever word she might speak speed with power to the mark.

'He says I'm not to go back, mother,' burst out the lad immediately the door closed. 'He can't mean it. I won't stay here to work on the land like a common ploughman. I won't stay. I'll emigrate or commit suicide first.'

'Wheesht, laddie, ye speak foolishly, and it'll no mend matters,' she said quickly. 'Ye ken your faither; he is just, but he is set in his judgment. Ye maun bide quietly and show a penitent spirit. Ye canna thraw wi' your faither; he'll no stand it even frae his ain.'

'But do you want me to give up? Why, look at the honours I've taken already. It would be a shame to let them all tie me down like a clod-

hopper here,' he cried, pushing his hot fingers through his curly fair hair. 'I won't do it. Mother, you won't let him condemn me to that.'

She looked at him mournfully, in silence for a moment. There was no doubt in her mind that, so far as future ministerial work was concerned, his career was over. One who had so far gone astray was no fit guide for the souls of others. She was an innocent and simple soul, but she had certain fixed ideas which would be difficult to set aside. One was that a minister should be a man set apart, of holier life and higher aims than the common. Bob could never attain to such a height now. She exaggerated, as was natural, his falling away, and it seemed to her an insuperable barrier.

But, at the same time, she did not think the farm the place for him. It had all come so suddenly, there was no time to think or to arrange matters. Bob must not be in a hurry; but youth cannot wait.

'Of course I know I've been idling a bit, and—well, not so steady as I ought to have been; but Denham has made the most of it. I'll pull up, mother. Don't look at me as if I were a

hopeless renegade. It's worse to bear than father's rage, though that's bad enough. You must persuade him to let me go on at least to the end of the session. I'll go to the bad faster here at a plough-tail than I would in the town, I can tell you that.'

Mrs. Gray was weary and perplexed, her heart sore to bursting, pitying the lad with all the tenderness of her motherly nature, yet feeling strongly that he was further away than ever from the grace which should sanctify a minister of Christ. Even common grace seemed to be some distance from him at the moment, for it was quite evident that he thought lightly of his offence, and that they were making a needless fuss. She had a long talk far into the night with her husband, but he was as adamant where Bob's return to college life was concerned. And in the end he had his way, and the lad took his share of the ordinary work on the farm, fretting his eager spirit against the dull routine of his life, chafing in rebellion not always hidden, and the winter wore miserably away. Stanerigg acted according to his light. He had no intention of ultimately obliging Bob to enter a calling so distasteful to

him, and he believed a few months on the fields would act as a wholesome discipline. ✓

There never had been a more miserable winter in Stanerigg. The atmosphere of the house, once so peaceable and wholesome and pleasant, was wholly changed. It told upon them all, but most of all upon Mrs. Gray, who became sad and old, worn and weary with the constant strain to keep the peace between the boy and his father. There was absolutely no sympathy between them ; and nobody knew, since he gave no sign, that the deep heart of Stanerigg yearned so unspeakably over his boy that many times he could have cried aloud in agony. But self-control, absolute repression of all feeling, had become second nature to him, and he preserved the stony silence which covered an aching heart. So the dreary days wore on till the voice of spring began to be heard in the land, soft winds whispering of hope stirred the budding boughs, and the green blades shot up to meet the kindly benediction of an April sky. And at that heavenly season, which brings some sense of comfort even to the most stricken in heart, the final desolation fell upon Stanerigg.

Very early in the morning, before even the

sleepy birds were stirring, when the mystery of the dawn still lay holily upon the earth, Bob Gray stole away from the house of his earthly father never to come back. They slept heavily in that healthy and hard-working household, and his stealthy exodus was unheard by any, even in their dreams. He stood still outside the door, and looking up to the room where his mother lay asleep, bared his head. He was nearer to heaven at that moment than he had yet been, and he even took a step towards the door. But some harsher thought restrained him, and he essayed to go, only pausing ere he passed by the gable to pluck a green sprig from the ivy which his mother's hand had planted, and which, flourishing as everything did under her kindly guidance, had become a great tree, clothing the grey old house with a green and living beauty refreshing to every eye which beheld it.

And when they woke, and came one by one to the duties of the new day, he was far on his way, having before him that wondrous land across the seas which has beckoned many, but has given too often a stone to those who asked for bread.

But when will youth accept hearsay? It is

personal knowledge and experience it craves, and will have, at any cost.

Having in his heart love, deep buried, but warm and true, he did not leave them wholly in the dark, but left his mother a letter, simply saying he was sick to death of his life, and not being able to support it any longer, had gone off to America, thus fulfilling the threat to emigrate which he had often made. He also said he would write if he got on, and that was all.

It is not for me to expatiate upon the feelings of the parents thus bereft; those who have suffered in a like manner will enter into their full bitterness. Gladly would either have laid down their life for their one son, yet somehow in their dealing with him they had missed the way.

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For two years nothing further was heard of Bob Gray. The heart-sickness of hope deferred left its mark on these two, but it was a blessed outcome of their sorrow, too deep and terrible to be shared with any outsider, that they drew nearer to each other and began to understand each other as they had not done in all the five-and-twenty years of their married life. They

did not sit down helplessly, or neglect the daily concerns which press even when the heart is breaking ; indeed, so little visible sign was given that many said they felt it but little, and were glad for their credit's sake to be rid of the wastrel.

One day, in the second spring after he had gone away, the first and last news of the wanderer came to Stanerigg, brought by the old one-eyed postman, Willie Chisholm, who had often wondered whether he would be privileged to bear some message from across the seas to the desolate home.

He did not see the mistress that day, to his keen disappointment, and it was Ailie Dyer who took in the little package and the letter bearing the stamp of the Republic. Her mistress took them tremblingly, and sat down at the open window, fumbling in her pocket for her spectacle-case, which was a new possession to which she had hardly yet got accustomed. And it happened that at the moment Stanerigg himself came in, and she bade him falteringly shut the door.

‘The news has come, an’ it’s no Bob’s writing. I’m feart to open it. Tak’ the letter first, faither.’

He took it from her, and quite unconscious of what he was doing, knelt down beside her so that he could open the letter at her knee. And they made a pathetic picture, the father and mother whom grief had aged before their time, the soft April wind playing with their grey hairs, and cooling the flush of excitement on their cheeks. It was a short letter written by the clergyman of a Methodist church in a little township situate among the distant wheat prairies of Iowa, and it ran thus :—

‘ Carterville, March 30th.

‘MADAM,—It is my sad duty to write to you concerning your son, Robert Gray, whom I was called a long distance to see yesterday, only to find him dying of a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs, contracted through exposure in one of the most terrible blizzards we have had for many years. I had not met or heard of him before, as the place where he has been working as hired man is thirteen miles from my manse, and difficult of access. It seems he had been there for about ten months, working for a decent, well-to-do German Jew, to whom he has given

the greatest satisfaction, being sober, industrious, and of an amiable disposition. I was grieved to find him too weak to say much, but he was able to tell me a little about himself, and to instruct me to carry out his last wishes. He had been wandering about a good deal, as young men must do out here without introduction or acquaintance; but so far as I could gather, he had never been in any sore straits, though sometimes in rather low water. I was surprised to find him possessed of a university training, though indeed I have met many similar instances. He did not detail to me his reasons for having left a home so comfortable and happy, and the memory of which he cherished so passionately that I was quite overcome. One thing you may take to comfort you, that he has not been living a prodigal's life out here, but the reverse. He was reserved about his own state of mind, but told me quite frankly he had no fear of death. He asked me to send you the enclosed package, which I have not opened, but which he told me he had carried within his vest next his heart during the last two years. I remained with him till his death, which was painless and beautiful, and I feel sure that

you may with the utmost confidence look forward to a happy re-union in a world where these sorrows are unknown. I regret that my letter must of necessity be meagre and unsatisfactory, as I only saw him once. He has been buried in a little cemetery not far from the farm on which he died. His employer defrayed the whole expenses, and all the neighbours turned out, showing that he was a general favourite. If there is anything further you would like to know, pray write, and I shall do my best to reply.—Meantime, with sincere Christian sympathy, I remain, Madam, yours faithfully,

‘ABIRAM MORSE.’

They were able to read the letter through with that wondrous self-control which had distinguished them throughout, and to untie the string and cut the wrappings which held their boy's legacy to them.

There was no letter. Within lay a little old Testament with brass clasps which his mother had given him on the day he first went to church. The clasps were intact, but would not close over something bulky within—a thick roll of American

dollar bills ; they fell out upon her lap, and then the book seemed to open naturally where lay the sprig of ivy, now dry and faded, which had once been living green on the gable-end of Stanerigg. On that open page two passages were deeply underlined—a message from the Unseen to those who had now no child :

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.'

And again : 'Behold, we count them happy which endure. . . . The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.'

By what tortuous ways that wandering soul had returned to the fold they would never know ; and though the hand of God seemed heavy upon them, they were not without their crumbs of comfort. Stanerigg bowed his head, now so nearly white, on his wife's knee, and a great sobbing shook him, like the wind of winter in the trees. But she sat still and quiet, with a wondering and deep light in her meek, sweet eyes, conscious for the moment that the veil between the seen and the unseen was so thin that her sharpened vision could almost

pierce it. Her life during the past two years had been one long prayer, and, lo, the sore travail of her soul had its answer—her boy was safe. Being thus assured, she could wait for Daybreak and the light of Heaven.

So, tranquilly, she is waiting still.

WORTHY OF HIS HIRE

WORTHY OF HIS HIRE

MRS. NEIL DENHAM was waiting for her husband to come to tea. It was a quarter-past five on a January afternoon, and the light, lengthening and strengthening day by day, still lingered in that pleasant dining-room where solid comfort reigned. It was furnished in warm crimson, the substantial mahogany chairs upholstered in rich morocco. The walls were a restful sea-green ; and several fine engravings, chiefly of Covenanting times, adorned them ; the recesses on either side of the fireplace held well-made mahogany bookcases, filled in every shelf. A black marble presentation clock and handsome bronzes decorated the mantelpiece, which was further relieved by two graceful glasses filled with white chrysanthemums. The Denhams did not dine late, but had a set tea at five o'clock. It was very daintily spread, the linen was of the whitest and finest, the china good, the silver shining.

Mary Denham was sitting on a hassock before the fire, glad of its cheery blaze. She had been out all the afternoon on church work, and she was cold and tired and a trifle out of sorts. She felt something in the air, a vague disturbance, portending she could not tell what. When the presentation clock, which had a very musical chime, struck the quarter after the hour, she jumped up rather impatiently, and went out to the study door. Her little tap elicited no reply, so she opened the door and went in. Friday afternoon was her husband's own—the rule of the house being that on that day alone he should remain absolutely undisturbed. But it was seldom indeed that he was not ready to come out at five o'clock for tea ; indeed, he had been known rather frequently to ring half an hour before it, to ask that it might be hastened.

The room was almost in darkness, and the fire out. At his desk sat the minister, with his arms folded above the sheets of his sermon-paper, and his head bowed down on them.

His wife sprang to his side in absolute dismay.

'Dear Neil, are you ill? What is it? Tell me.'

He raised his head, and looked at her rather

mournfully. He had been run down for a good while, she knew ; even the August holiday had failed of its purpose, because it had been so ruthlessly sacrificed to oblige others. Neil Denham had not been a Sunday out of a pulpit for fifteen months.

‘I’m not ill, Mary ; only tired. Has your tea bell rung ? I was waiting and wishing for it, and I got thinking of something else.’

‘Get up,’ she said, with that gentle peremptoriness so pleasant to obey in one we love. ‘The room is icy cold, and just look at your hands.’

She did not ask a single question, though her quick eye saw by the state of the papers on the desk that the afternoon had been absolutely barren of written work. He rose, nothing loth, and crossed the hall to the warm, brightly-lit dining-room, the sight of which brightened his face. His wife locked the study-door before she followed him, and put the key in her pocket.

‘Come, dear ; Jeanie has made a special scone for you, and here’s a Stanerigg egg. I had a big basket from Lizzie this afternoon. She always remembers Friday. Well, I’ve been at the Dorcas, and then I called at Mrs. Hamilton’s, and Macmillan was there again. He’s always there.

Do you think they're going to make a match of it? A grand thing for him, wouldn't it? And in Melville Street I met Mrs. Rattray, and the doctor's been ordered to Algiers for the winter, and Jimmy's got measles, and Katie's lungs can't stand the east wind any longer. So she's to take her father to Algiers, and poor Mrs. Rattray's got to stay at home and see to the supply. I'd like to see me let *you* away to Algiers without me, even if we had a Katie to send with you. Now I knew you'd like that egg. Yes, I'll take one myself.'

The atmosphere of the room, the tempting delicacy of the viands, above all, the bright, loving light on the sweet face behind the tea-cosy, began to take their due effect on the tired spirit of the man.

'What a thing it is,' he said, as he sent in his cup, 'to have a home and you in it! Who am I. to have so much given me?'

'Another word, Neil Denham, and I'll, I'll——' she said threateningly. 'I had a little note from Lizzie. How awfully they are feeling about poor Bob yet! She says Mr. Gray has gone off his sleep, and wanders about the room at night talk-

ing about the blizzard which gave the boy his last illness. Isn't it sad ?'

'It is. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,' he said, as if speaking to himself.

'No, he isn't,' was the prompt retort. 'He mostly makes it for himself. I wouldn't say it to Lizzie for worlds, but I do think they were a good deal to blame about Bob. They never understood him, and forgot that he was young. I sometimes wonder whether we did wisely in interfering. Well, you have made a fairly respectable tea, and as a reward I'll give you a treat—there.'

She took his pipe out of her pocket, put it in his hand, and made him sit down in the big easy-chair, and even handed him the matches. Then she pushed back the table, and sat down on the hassock again, near enough her husband's knee to lay her head on it if she felt so disposed.

'Now, please to tell me what's the matter to-day. Was there anything amiss with the text ?'

'Nothing.'

He put his pipe unlighted on the mantelpiece, and looked down into his wife's face. His own was so startlingly grave that she felt suddenly apprehensive.

‘ Mary, I begin to fear that my best work is done.’

She looked up at him in silence a full minute, and there was less surprise in that look than might have been expected.

‘ It’s killing you ; I knew it would ! Oh, Neil, why did we ever leave Faulds ?’

She got up, excitement and distress gaining upon her. She had repressed herself so long—kept her pent feelings down ; now they carried her away like a Lammas flood.

‘ Perhaps it was a poor place and the stipend low ; but it was the country, and the people loved us,’ she cried, walking down the room with a quick, nervous tread. ‘ Miners only and farmers, but they had reverent souls, and their hearts were warm and true. They did not come on Sunday to criticise their minister and compare one sermon with another, glad if they could say there was a falling off in quality. No, they came because they loved him and his message, and they had even a warm corner in their hearts for the minister’s wife, and they never thought her old-fashioned, or laughed at her clothes. Oh, Neil, why did we ever leave our little kirk ? Let’s go

back to it—to the place where we were happy and content, and where we buried our little bairn. It was far, far better than the stress of existence here.'

He looked at her in sorrowful amazement, clean lifted for the moment out of his own depression of soul. The intensity of her speech left no doubt that it came from the innermost recesses of her heart, revealing a depth of feeling, a yearning home-sickness which touched him inexpressibly.

'Mary, I had no idea of this!' he cried. 'I thought you were very happy here.'

'Oh, so I am — wherever you are I am happy ; bnt I have eyes that can see, and a heart that can feel. I can be silent, too, with the best of them ; but the time has come to speak. Before I came to the study-door, I was going over in my mind what you had done this week, and here it is:—

'Monday morning you saw six people, went to three committee meetings, and gave your lecture at the Mutual Improvement.

'Tuesday, the Bible Society conference, Amy Rutherford's wedding, and the Kirkcaldy soiree.

'Wednesday, opened the zenana sale, two funerals, and the prayer-meeting, besides visiting a lot of sick.

'Thursday, two baptisms, your ordinary visitation, and the mission social. You have had this afternoon, thanks to Nellie's common sense, but it hasn't done you much good. Then there's the Band of Hope to-night, though you're not going a foot to that. I'll go myself and tell them the plain truth. Mr. Robertson's got some common sense; he'll understand.'

'But, Mary, all you have enumerated is only part of a minister's ordinary duty,' her husband said mildly, wishing perhaps that she would not put the case quite so strongly.

'I'm not saying anything about that, Neil; but what I do want to know is where you have the time to write three new sermons every week, and to keep them up to the mark, spiritually and intellectually. It can't be done.'

'I am afraid you are right,' he assented, rather sadly. 'But the remedy?'

'There isn't any, except to leave it. Let's leave it, Neil, or we'll be broken and old before our time. They're not grateful. All they want is to have a clever minister in Drumphail, and have his sermons reported every week. It casts a kind of glory over them; they feel a sort of self-

satisfaction because you've justified their choice, and that's all.'

'You are rather hard on them, Mary,' he said, amazed at the revelation of his wife's character—caustic, clear-sighted, severe. She had never shown it to him before.

'It's the same with poor Doctor Rattray; his nervous system is shattered, and he'll die of overwork. You won't die if I can help it. I have nobody but you. Won't you go back to the country, Neil?'

She knelt down in front of him, and looked up into his face with eyes which had a prayer in them. His only answer was a sob he could not restrain.

'We'll talk it over, wife, when we are both calmer,' he said at length. 'I thought the Lord had called me to this work. We'll ask His guiding, never yet denied to those who ask in faith.'

She said no more, and in half an hour left him to take his place at the Band of Hope meeting. She persuaded him to lie down on the dining-room sofa, and having the key of the study-door in her pocket, felt sure he could not get at

his books or desk. About eight o'clock he was sitting at the table with a Bible before him, seeking a new inspiration from the pages which had never yet failed him, when Nellie looked in rather hesitatingly, having been absolutely forbidden by her mistress to admit anybody to the house on any pretext whatever.

'It's a young gentleman, sir ; he's very anxious to see you. I told him you were busy, but he seemed so anxious ; he said he wouldn't keep you long.'

'All right, Nellie, show him in,' said the minister cheerfully, and even in a tone of relief. He was in that tense state of mind when any diversion is welcome. Nellie, relieved also, immediately showed the visitor in. He was a young fellow about three-and-twenty, gentlemanly in appearance and attire, and having an open, pleasant, intelligent face.

'Good-evening,' said Denham, holding out his hand with a cordial smile. 'What can I do for you ?'

The lad put his hand in the friendly one extended, and Denham wondered at the intentness of the look in his eyes.

‘You don’t know me, Mr. Denham ; my name’s Angus—Willie Angus. I’m a medical student.’

‘Sit down, Willie Angus,’ said the minister, with his rare and winning smile. ‘That’s a Forfarshire name, isn’t it ? I’m a Brechin man myself.’

‘I know you are, but we’re farther north. My father’s a doctor on the Moray Firth ; and a jolly hard life of it he has, I can tell you, working early and late for a batch of children who, if I’m a specimen, are the most ungrateful wretches on the face of the earth.’

His pleasant face took a look of extreme bitterness, which quite changed it.

‘But they’re not ; they’re all decent. I’m the black sheep,’ he went on quickly. ‘It’s a poor place, fees are low, and my father’s hardest and most self-denying work is done for charity. There’s eight of us—I’m the eldest—and they’re all stinting themselves for me. My sisters haven’t had a new frock for twelve months, so that I may have the money to—to waste.’

‘That you admit it, my boy, proves that that miserable state of things is at an end,’ said the minister gravely, yet with a hopeful note in his voice.

'Last Sunday night I had a headache after a champagne supper at Rutherford's on Saturday night, and I didn't get up till dinner-time. Then I came out for a stroll across Bruntsfield Links—I lodge in Warrender Park—and at the Barclay I saw the boards up with your name.'

'Yes,' said Denham; 'I preached there last Sunday night.'

'Every letter almost that my mother writes she asks me if I've been to hear you, and I always shuffle out of it. I don't know what made me do it, but I went in. I was late—they were just finishing the hymn before the sermon—and as I sat down in the gallery you gave out the text, "Mother, behold thy son!"'

Denham remembered the words well. That sermon had been of the travail of his soul, and he had felt himself so out of touch with those listening to him that night, that it had been agony to him to preach. And, lo, the arrow so feebly and painfully sped had reached its mark.

'There was something in your face I liked. Of course I've heard a lot about you, and I know fellows, students like myself, who go to hear you every Sunday, and swear by you all the week. I

mean, they remember what you say, and do it, —and that's something, I tell you, in our set. Well, as I listened I felt what a sneak and cad I was. Did you know I was there and all about me? I thought you did.'

Denham shook his head.

'I saw nobody, my lad. I was depressed myself, and had but little joy in my message.'

'Well, it went for me anyhow. I've not done anything awful, you know, only wasted, that is, idled and spent money I ought to have saved. I was ploughed twice in my first, and I'll be ploughed sure in my second in April, and it's a disgrace; for a fellow with ordinary brains, if he likes to work, can get through the first time.'

'And now, my boy?' said Denham, pushing his chair nearer to him. It was a curious picture. The grave, pale, intellectual face of Denham, lit by a light rarely seen there, and the flushed, eager, shamefaced lad laying bare his soul, to his own unspeakable relief.

'I've been miserable all the week. I wanted to come and see you, but I couldn't somehow. I've written a letter to my father. I want you to read it. If you think I should, I'll send it.'

He fumbled nervously in his pocket, and took out an envelope.

'Are you sure you would like me to see this?' asked Denham.

'Yes,' said the lad simply.

'Perhaps it might be better to say nothing, Willie, and to let the future atone, especially if he does not know you have been idling your time. There is no use giving needless pain.'

'He does know it, though. He's been at college himself, but he's awfully good over it, though I know he feels it too,' said the lad, and his voice grew husky.

Denham opened the letter without another word. It was very short, and he soon read it through. His eyes filled with tears as he handed it back.

'Send it, lad; send it. It will gladden the old man's heart. God bless you. Shall we ask Him now?'

The man who in his youth had known temptation, and who had not forgotten its fiery trials, entered into the travail of the lad's soul in that prayer, which hallowed the place, and brought heaven down to earth.

‘And now about that exam. You’ve got to pass it, and with honours. What are you weak in?’

‘Anatomy, awfully.’

‘Do you know Henderson the coach?’

‘Don’t I? but I haven’t any money, and I can’t ask dad for that. I’ll work as hard as I can, and if I do fail, I’ll know it wasn’t all my fault this time.’

‘Come back on Monday night to tea at five, and we’ll go and see Henderson. He’s an old college chum of mine. You’ve got to get through this time. Good-night, my boy. God bless you. Do you remember the text about the cup of cold water? You’ve given me a cup of cold water to-night, and it will be remembered to you.’

Mrs. Denham’s step was light as she crossed her own doorstep that night at half-past ten, parting from the chief elder at the door with a warm hand-clasp. The shadow just hovered across her face a moment as she opened the dining-room door; and lo, there was her husband writing as for dear life, and she knew from his face that there was light within.

‘Oh, Neil dear, it’s not so bad quite as I made out,’ she cried breathlessly. ‘I’ve had such a

nice long talk with Mr. Robertson, and what do you think? The session have had a private meeting, and there's going to be a congregational one next week to consider about getting you a missionary, so that you may have more time for study. They do love us a little, I am sure, and I felt quite rebuked.'

She rested her chin on his hair, and looked over his shoulder to the written page.

'A new text—"I will sing a new song unto Thee, O God."'

'What a grand one, Neil! Surely you have had great uplifting of soul while I've been away.'

'Yes, dearest, our dark hour was God's opportunity,' he said, and then told her what had happened in her absence. Her face shone as he spoke, and her bosom heaved.

'We'll not go to the country just yet, Neil, at least for good; for the work needs you here,' she said. 'But we'll go out on Monday to see Robert and Lizzie; and we can lay a thank-offering on Elsie's grave.'

A LOST LAMB

A LOST LAMB

WHEN old Archibald Haldane died in Westerlaw, they said there could not be much strife or heart-burning over his property, because it was bound to be equally divided between his two sons, Archie and Jamie. There was land as well as money, for old Westerlaw had been both saving and successful, especially the former, and his familiar appellation in the neighbourhood of Faulds was Grippy Haldane. The Haldanes had been long in Westerlaw, first as tenants, and then as lairds. In the course of his lairdship Grippy also annexed Easterlaw, which adjoined, so that at his death there was a place for each of his two sons. His wife had long predeceased him, and he had no daughter, so that the division was easy enough. Archie, being the elder, became laird of Westerlaw, while Jamie took up his abode at Easterlaw. They were sheep-farms chiefly, with a field or two of arable land on the low grounds,

but stock was their stand-by, and two shepherds were necessary to each. They had substantial stone dwelling-houses, built for the comfortable shelter of a plain family ; if anything, Easterlaw was the more pretentious, and occupied a beautiful site, commanding a prospect almost unequalled for beauty and diversity. As it happened, Jamie Haldane was a young man of some taste and refinement, and he took great pains to beautify his home, planting ornamental shrubs in the grounds, and even cutting a carriage drive through the wood to the main road, and putting a handsome iron gateway at the end of it. Archie, who took after his father, and had a very coarse strain in him, was filled with wrath and contempt for his brother's extravagance, gave him five years to be 'roupit oot,' as he expressed it, and promised himself much satisfaction when that certain event came to pass. But at the end of five years Jamie seemed as flourishing in a quiet way as ever, and had added a bowling-green to his grounds, and a conservatory to his house. Yet his accounts were regularly paid, and nobody had anything but praise and good words of him. He had no vices, consequently he could afford a

little to gratify his quieter tastes, whereas his brother was a hard drinker, and a big, blustering kind of man, not much of a favourite with anybody. And Westerlaw continued to be the rough and ready house it had ever been, hardly a carpet to the floors, and but little comfort anywhere, whereas at Easterlaw there were snug rooms, well furnished, and scarcely missing a woman's care ; books to read, a piano to play on, and a welcome to any neighbour of an evening to play a hand at whist. But the neighbours whose soul yearned for whisky kept away ; for the evening beverage at Easterlaw was only coffee, well made and fragrant, but with no cinder in it. But Jamie Haldane's friends came for the pleasure of his company, and any man who spent one evening there was anxious to spend another.

The brothers married about the same time, and it seemed as if they ought to have changed mates. Archie married a gentle, refined, meek-spirited girl, the daughter of the late parish minister, a creature who looked as if a rude blast would kill her. What affinity she found in rough Archibald Haldane remains one of those unsolved matrimonial mysteries of which this world is full. Yet

they seemed to rub along well enough. Though she never got her way in things pertaining to the house, and was kept very tight where money was concerned, she never gave anybody the impression of being unhappy or of having repented her choice.

Jamie, to the astonishment of everybody, married a big strapping, loud-spoken farmer's daughter from Roxburghshire, a woman who knew the value of a stirk or a horse as well as her husband, and took the liveliest possible interest in all out-door matters. She was very handsome, and dressed well; a good housewife too, and her warm heart could be discerned in her honest, laughing face and in her cheery voice. There were few happier couples in that neighbourhood than Jamie and Betty Haldane. Long before the double marriage the estrangement began, and soon became complete, between the brothers, there being very few comings and goings between Westerlaw and Easterlaw. The long dryness culminated in a bitter quarrel one winter, about four years after the respective mistresses came to the farms. A dry-stone dyke running between the hills marked the boundary between the two places. At a particular part of this boundary

there was a very bieldy hollow, which was used occasionally by Easterlaw shepherds as a ewe-bucht—for which purpose it was fenced off from the rest of the ground. The pasture, however, being exposed to the clean sweep of the north wind, and very stony, was not good, and the sheep did not much frequent that side of the hill. Over the boundary wall, however, the slope of Westerlaw hill was very sweet pasturage, and much favoured by the Westerlaw flock, so that the bucht would have been of more use to Archie, and many a longing eye he had after it. Had the brothers been friendly, there is no doubt Jamie would have cheerfully conceded it to him, but, indeed, he did not know it was coveted. One terribly bitter morning in December, when the world was white with a sudden storm, that had broken in the night after a day of spring-like mildness, the maid at Easterlaw went to the dining-room door, where her master and mistress were breakfasting, and said the shepherd wanted to speak to Mr. Haldane. He went out to the kitchen at once.

‘Well, Geordie, there’s a morning! Nothing wrong, I hope?’

'The sheep's a' richt, sir,' replied the shepherd. 'I came to see whether ye kent that the dyke was knockit doon at Binnhill, an' built roond the bucht, takin' it in to Westerlaw.'

Easterlaw just stared.

'What do you say, Geordie—the dyke knocked down, and what more?'

'Westerlaw's taen the bucht; he's had a long 'ee efter 't a' his days,' observed Geordie, with the outspoken freedom of his class. 'I thocht maybe you had made him a present o't.'

'Get some breakfast, an' I'll walk over with you when I've had mine,' said the master, and walked back to the dining-room.

His comely wife was sitting with her toes on the polished bar of the fender, getting herself thoroughly warmed, as she said, before setting out on her household duties.

'Nane o' the sheep lost in the drifts, I hope?' she observed, looking over her shoulder with lively concern, which increased when she saw the expression on her husband's usually placid face.

'No. Geordie says Westerlaw has annexed our bucht on Binnhill. I'll just step over and see presently. Give me another cup of tea, Betty.'

‘Annexed the bucht—what does that mean?’

‘Stolen it, my woman,’ he replied, more irritably than she had ever heard him speak before. ‘He’s knocked down the dyke and built it up again to enclose his theft. I wonder what he thinks I am.’

‘Two can play at that little game, Jamie,’ said his wife pleasantly. ‘We’ll amuse oorsels ca’in’ doon his dyke, an’ settin’ up the ancient landmark again.’

But his set face did not relax, nor the colour return to it. He was not a passionate man like Archie, but his slow anger once kindled was more terrible than the blustering wind of Westerlaw’s frequent passion.

‘May I come too, Jamie?’ she asked, as he prepared to accompany the shepherd over the hills.

‘If you like, but the snow’s a foot and more everywhere, let alone drifts.’

‘I’m no’ mindin’ for that,’ she cried, and ran to put on boots and gaiters and a stout macintosh cloak, which with a woollen hood tied cosily over her ears, protected her against any weather.

So they tramped together to Binnhill, and there sure enough found it was as Geordie Purdom had

said, the ewe-bucht neatly built in by an extension of the dyke, till it looked as if it belonged to Westerlaw.

'Ay, Geordie, man, this is fine work,' said Easterlaw between his teeth. 'We'll get Alec Glover up an' mak' short work of the bucht, an' if that disna dae we'll get the police.'

Betty Haldane observed that her husband was in a terrible rage. He only spoke Scotch in his anger. The whole thing seemed nothing but a good joke to her, and the shepherds rather enjoyed it too, but it seemed to touch James Haldane in a very sore bit. Before noon Alec Glover, the slater from the Cleugh, his two men, and the shepherds were at Binnhill demolishing the bucht, and by nightfall the dyke was restored to its original site. Next forenoon back comes the shepherd to say there were men from Westerlaw knocking down the dyke again. Then Jamie Haldane got as white as death, and strode away over the crisp white hills with a terrible hate in his soul. Had Betty seen him, she would either have kept him at home or gone with him, but it was churning-day, and she trusted no hired woman to make up her butter, which had not its equal

from Easterlaw to Haddington and beyond it. When Easterlaw, with Geordie Purdom at his back, strode down the Binnhill he saw his brother Archie, a big burly figure, leaning against the dyke watching the operations with a queer little smile on his lips. He stood up as Jamie approached, ready for the fray. It was not to be expected that Easterlaw's first words would be conciliatory or even wisely chosen. He was not a profane man, but he swore a great oath, and bade Archie clear off his wall, or he'd fell him to the ground. Archie was not slow to swear back again, and the war of words was such as the men who heard it did not forget for long.

'It's mine!' cried Westerlaw. 'Ye ken as weel as I do that the bucht was in Westerlaw afore we got Easterlaw, an' that the auld man only shifted the dyke to please himsel'. I need it an' ye dinna, an' hae it I wull.'

'Ye winna,' replied Jamie more quietly, the first heat of his passion spent, though the anger within burned steadily. 'As fast as ye build I'll knock doon, and if ye try me ower far I'll hae the law o' ye.'

It would not profit me to retail any more of

this ill quarrel, in which was gathered all the stored bitterness of years, and they parted raging at and hating each other for the time being with a mortal hatred. For several days the farce was carried on, and when the thing got wind various curious busybodies came to the seat of war on the Binnhill, and were duly edified by the spectacle there. Then there came another terrible storm of snow, which drifted up everything and put a decided check on the hostile operations, so that there was a few days' respite. One afternoon, about five o'clock, Betty Haldane was sitting by her dining-room window sewing, when she beheld her husband's brother striding up to the door. He had a queer look on his face, an expression of such set and intolerable anguish, that, forgetting all the past strife and her bitter resentment against him, she ran out to the door.

'Archie, what is it? What terrible thing has happened?'

'Ye havena seen oor wee Nancie, have ye?' he asked hoarsely. 'She's lost; we havena seen her since forenoon, an' look at the snaw! I believe she's buriel in't, an' we've nae bairn. She hasna been here, I suppose?'

Betty shook her head, and her blue eyes filled with tears. She had no child, and the blue-eyed Nancie was the one possession she envied Westerlaw. But she never suffered the only disappointment of her wifeness to depress others, though it gave her many a sad hour.

‘Nancie hasna been here, Archie, since last harvest, when Jeanie brocht her. But hoo did it happen that she got oot? Is ’t naeboddy’s business to see to the bairn?’

‘Yes, but they were terrible busy in the kitchen, saltin’ pork, an’ the mistress bakin’. The bairn was playin’ aboot, naeboddy heedin’ her muckle; an’ she just disappeared like magic.’

‘An’ hae ye socht everywhere?’

Westerlaw made a gesture of impatience and despair.

‘There’s no’ a hole or corner aboot the place we hinna rakit. But look at the snaw! She’s feet deep in the drift by now; an’ we no’ kennin’ where to turn. If God Almichty wantit to punish me for my ill-daein’ He micht hae ta’en a’thing, an’ welcome, had He but left me my little bairn.’

Now Betty had never seen the soft side of her

brother-in-law, and at sight of his awful grief her heart melted within her like rain.

‘Jamie’s at Edinburgh, an’ he micht no’ be hame, seein’ the weather, or the morn. Bide a meenit, an’ I ’ll gang back wi’ you to Jeanie.’

He entered at her bidding, but would come no farther than the hall, where he sat down stupidly, the picture of despair. Betty ran to the kitchen and bade them get the dog-cart out, Westerlaw having evidently walked over the hills. In ten minutes they were on the road, driving rapidly round the long sweep it took at the foot of the hills to Westerlaw. Betty Haldane had not crossed the threshold of Westerlaw for two whole years, but the two wives were friendly enough on their own account, and Mrs. Archie had paid a stolen visit to Easterlaw the previous summer when the respective husbands were absent at the Highland Society’s show at Inverness. She found the distracted mother wandering in and out the house like a mad thing; and when she saw her sister-in-law enter, a strange feeling of relief and strength and hope came to her, and she just ran crying into her arms.

‘Yes, yes, my dear,’ said Betty, crooning over

her as if she had been a baby, her ample arms protecting the slender, drooping figure most tenderly. 'Dinna greet, your sweet wee Nancie's no' lost. God has her safe. D'ye no' mind hoo He took the lambs in His arms? Yes, yes, she's safe. We'll find her yet.'

But though half a countryside was out looking for Nancie Haldane, night fell, and her bed was empty; and there was no doubt in the mind of any man or woman that the bairn was, as her father put it, 'feet deep in the drift.'

It faired in the evening, and the sky cleared, showing patches of heavenly blue, lit by the stars of eternal promise. About nine o'clock, the doctor having given poor Mrs. Archie a draught which would calm her nerves and perhaps give her the merciful oblivion of sleep, Betty Haldane drove home to her own house. She was weary with her own grief and the pain of witnessing the desolation of Westerlaw, and she beheld the light in her own windows with a little rush of joy at her heart. For that light meant that Jamie was home. He had not been in the house twenty minutes, and was but swallowing a bite of supper before following his wife to Westerlaw. She

came into the room trembling, and burst into tears.

'Oh, my man, for the first time I can say I'm glad we've nae bairn. Yon's awfu', awfu'. Puir Jeanie, puir Archie! It breaks my very heart.'

Jamie Haldane was not lacking in responsive sympathy, and they mourned for the stricken house of Westerlaw as if there never had been discord or strife in the past.

It would serve no purpose for them to go back that night, and they went to bed early, determined to drive over the first thing in the morning.

That night in her troubled sleep Betty Haldane dreamed a dream. The first part of it was confused, and had to do with the quarrel about the Binnhill, but suddenly everything grew clear, and she saw a sight in the ewe-bucht which made her heart leap within her. She thought it was full of sheep with their lambs, and that in a far corner, crouching close to the dyke, in the bieldiest bit of all, was an old gentle, grey-faced ewe with her own little lamb close beside her; but there was something else, a bit of bright colour, and a gleam of white above it, and the sheen of a child's golden head.

She awoke with a great start, her face wet with tears, and, springing out of bed, began to put on her clothes.

‘Jamie, Jamie Haldane,’ she cried, ‘get up an’ come wi’ me—Nancie is found! She’s in the bucht on Binnhill—come an’ help me to carry her to Westerlaw.’

‘I daresay you’re daft, Betty,’ her husband replied; ‘the thing’s gotten on your brain. Lie down and sleep.’

‘I tell you she’s there. I saw her in my dream, God sent that dream. I prayed ere I fell asleep that the bairn micht be saved, an’ she is saved. Ye can sleep if ye like, I’m no feared to gang mysel’.’

‘What o’clock is it, my woman?’ inquired Easterlaw mildly, observing that his wife would not be put past her set purpose.

‘Half-past three,’ she replied shortly, as she buttoned on her gown.

Fifteen minutes thereafter the two stepped out into the nipping morning air and set out for Binnhill. Easterlaw did not for a moment believe that anything would come of this mad exploit, but Betty walked on confidently, her bonnie blue

eyes glowing like two stars under her crimson hood. It took them half an hour to get over the slippery hills, and Betty's heart almost stood still as they approached the bucht. But presently she gave a little cry, and dashed in among the sheep, causing them to start up with affrighted cries. And there it was, all as she had seen it in her God-sent dream—the old ewe with her little lamb at her breast, and the other lost lamb cuddling close to it, fast asleep. And the wonder of it sank into Jamie Haldane's soul, holding him spell-bound. Betty stooped down with a great sob and gathered the bairn close to her warm breast, scarcely waking her, though she crooned over her in a fashion which made a strange stir at her husband's heart.

'Auntie's bonnie bairnie, her ain wee doo! Sleep, sleep, bairnie, ye'll sune be in your ain little by.'

They were now halfway between the farms, and the only course seemed to be to walk straight into Westerlaw, which they reached about five o'clock! The poor mother was still mercifully asleep; but Archibald Haldane, bowed to the earth with his agony, roamed the house miserably,

thinking only of his little bairn beneath the snow.

He heard them before they knocked at the door; and when Betty laid wee Nancie in his arms, safe and sleeping, though her curls were damped out by the snow which had kissed them, he had no strength left in him, but sat down holding her helplessly, crying like a child. Betty had all her wits about her, and she ran to the kitchen and broke up the fire, which is never out night nor day in such kitchens, and in a minute had hot milk ready for the bairn, who woke up wonderingly, too sleepy to remember anything. But she took the milk eagerly, and then Betty rolled her in a shawl and laid her in her mother's bed and kissed them both.

'Now, Jamie,' she said bravely, 'we'll tramp hame again, my man, if ye like.'

But Archie barred the way.

'No' yet. I've been a brute, Jamie, but I'll mak' it up to you, if ye'll tak' my hand.'

'Wheesht, man,' said Jamie in that shy, pained way peculiar to reticent natures who hate displays of feeling. 'Haud your tongue. The bucht was no' worth quarrellin' ower. It's yours, if ye like

to keep it. At least it's Nancie's—eh, Betty?—she's settled the question.'

And they positively ran out of the house, nor had they any sense of time or distance as they walked the frozen fields, on account of the joy and thankfulness in their hearts.

These things happened some years ago, and now the two houses are as one, and there are bairns blithe and bonnie in Easterlaw, but Nancie remains the one ewe lamb of Archibald Haldane and Jeanie his wife.

I must not forget to mention that when Mrs. Gray of Stanerigg heard the wonderful and heart-moving story, which soon became the talk of the countryside, she, seeing in it, as in most earthly affairs, the finger of God, said, with a deep sweet light in her eyes—

'I wad hae a picter o't, so that it may be seen of the bairns' bairns in a' time to come, an' show them the Lord's lovingkindness. An' what I paid I wadna care, but it should be well done by the best in the land.'

It so happened that the following summer a great painter from London, though not London-born, was in the neighbourhood, and was enter-

tained at Stanerigg, where gentle and simple alike were made welcome. And while there he painted the picture, which he called 'The Lost Lamb.' Archibald Haldane paid the price for it ungrudgingly and cheerfully, though it was the value of a year's rent; but when the painter, believing it would be the picture of the year, spoke of taking it away to London to let others see it, Westerlaw made his mouth long and thin, and shook his head. Then the painter, who was also a man of spiritual discernment, forbore to press, though his disappointment was very keen, because he saw that the inwardness and sacredness of the matter dwelt with the man, and that he shrank to submit it to the public gaze.

So the great picture, which they say will be worth a king's ransom some day, hangs upon the wall at Westerlaw, and its duplicate at Easterlaw, where they may be seen of the unbelieving to this day.

AT THE DOOR

AT THE DOOR

THE doctor's gig drove out by the new lodge-gate of Easterlaw about half-past eight on a Saturday night. It was the month of September, and in that late neighbourhood the corn was scarcely yet ripe for the sickle. It was a lovely and pleasant evening, the close of a lovely and pleasant day. The moon the reapers love was high in the clear heavens, in which no cloud or shadow had a place. The hips and haws flamed in every hedgerow, and the rowans were ripe and red on the boughs. Bramble and crab-apple, too, were ready for those who knew where to find them, and the fulness of harvest and vintage brooded over the land.

‘Steady, Willie, mind that sharp turn,’ said the doctor, as they swept through the gates.

His grave lips still wore the smile with which he had parted from the Laird at the door, and his fingers tingled with the grip of his grateful hand. For, since sunset the previous night, Betty Hal-

dane had been in the valley of the shadow ; and now all danger was past, and a son and heir was born to the childless pair.

The doctor had been at Easterlaw the best part of the day, willing, though he could do but little in the earlier hours, to give them the strength and comfort of his presence.

It was a presence well beloved wherever it was known. He was a man considerably past middle life, grizzled and aged before his time by the exigencies and exposure of his calling. As he sat in his gig, it could be seen that his shoulders were bent, and he wore his soft hat drawn well over his brows, so that the full contour of his face could not be seen. So he had ridden day in and day out, at the call of all who needed him, gentle and simple alike, for two-and-thirty years.

'It's a fine night, Willie, and the air smells fresh,' he said. 'Drive in by Stanerigg. I heard Miss Elsie say this morning she was to tea there this afternoon. Maybe we can drive her home.'

'Miss Elsie 'll be hame lang syne, sir,' observed Willie promptly. 'But we 'll gang an' see, if ye like.'

It was a curious reply to an order, but these

two, who had been master and man together for a score out of the thirty years, understood each other as few do in these days of short engagements and many changes in the domestic world.

‘Ay, drive in and see. Mrs. Gray will be pleased, anyhow, to hear the news, and it’ll not take us ten minutes out of our way.’

Willie turned in obediently at the Stanerigg road-end, and, when they had driven up the brae, the doctor got out at the wicket gate.

‘Just wait here ; I won’t stop.’

The little wood was very dark, but its footing was familiar to him, and he found his way to the door.

Mrs. Gray, sitting alone at the fireside, knew the doctor’s knock, and ran into the hall just as the door was opened to him. Betty Haldane’s name was on her lips, and when she saw the twinkle in his eye she knew that all was well at Easterlaw.

‘A fine, strapping son, at half-past seven ; all well. Is my lass away home?’

‘Yes, long ago, afore the darkenin’ ; but ye’ll come in.

'Yes, for half a minute. The glow of Stanerigg fireside is aye cheery, Mrs. Gray,' he said, as he stepped within the room. 'But where's Mr. Gray?'

'At the session-meetin'. They're considerin' the vacancy,' she replied, with a slight smile.

'They'll consider it a while before they manage to fill Neil Denham's place,' he observed; for though a Churchman himself, he yielded to none in his admiring regard for the late Free Church minister of Faulds. He laid his soft hat on the table, and leaning his arm on the mantelpiece, pushed his fingers through his hair. As he stood there, Mrs. Gray thought, as she had often thought, what a noble figure he had, and a fine, trust-inspiring face. But it was a face which bore the seal of a great sadness.

'They'll be fell prood o' the heir at Easterlaw.'

'Ay, they are. She made a brave struggle. She's made of fine stuff, Mrs. Gray, and I don't wonder at Easterlaw. He was clean demented for the time being when I feared we might lose her.'

'It's a very ill happening to a man, Doctor Gourlay, to lose his wife,' she observed.

'Oh, very; and what fettle was my limmer in

the night?' he asked, and the tenderness in his melancholy eyes was wonderful to see.

'Very happy. She's a dear lassie. Ye are weel aff wi' sic a dochter. I only wish she were mine.'

'God knows I am,' he said abruptly. 'I came here to-night, Mrs. Gray, what for, think you?'

'To tell me about Easterlaw, maybe.'

'Not a bit of it. You might have waited till the morn, like other folk, for me. But I've had a queer feeling all day. I can't account for it.'

'A bodily feelin'? Ye look a bit spent. Will you tak' a mouthfu'?'

'No, thank you. Easterlaw pressed me hard, but I don't know what may be waiting in the shape of work down by. I'm well enough in body. You have never thought me a religious man, have you, Mrs. Gray?'

She looked up at him quickly, struck by his question.

'That depends on what you mean by a religious man, doesn't it, doctor?'

'Maybe, but you've not known me to be a man given to religious talk like some.'

'True religion and undefiled is to visit the

fatherless and the widow in their affliction,' she murmured, with a very sweet note in her voice. 'And it is the life that speaks.'

'Then would you call me a religious man, Mrs. Gray?'

The question stirred her heart. They were old friends, and had talked the serious issues of life over together many times, but never in all the years she had known him had he voluntarily started the subject of religion.

'Wad ye really like me to say what I think, Doctor Gourlay?'

'I think I would,' he answered, with the simplicity of a child.

'Then I think ye are nearer the Kingdom than maist, nay, that ye are at the very door. An' there's no a man, woman, or bairn in the hail strath that wad differ wi' me.'

'At the very door,' he repeated dreamily, and took a turn across the room, with his hands, the long, firm, gentle hands that had relieved many a sore pain, crossed behind his back.

'Long ago, Mrs. Gray, I was an ambitious man, that saw no further than my own advancement. There was no limit to that ambition. I promised

myself a year or two in the country to get grounded in my work, then a consulting practice, and a professorship in my own college. That was the programme, and here I am.'

'But ye hae blessed a haill countryside, my man; dinna forget that,' Mrs. Gray observed quickly.

'Do you think I have done my duty?' he asked, pausing at the table, and regarding her with great earnestness.

This strange question puzzled her, but there was no hesitation about her reply.

'If it's a bit heartenin' you need, doctor, blithe am I to gie it. Duty is no' the word. Ye've toiled late an' early, and gien o' your best to gentle and simple, to thankfu' and unthankfu' alike, without thocht o' fee or reward, and the record is safe up by.'

She took her hand from her knitting and slightly raised it, and he understood. But still his sad brow did not clear.

'Do you—do you think I have done my duty by my poor wife?'

Tears stood in Lisbeth Gray's eyes, and it was a moment before she could command her voice.

'Oh, my man, what ails ye? It's the Wicked

Ane that's tormentin' you wi' sic thochts. Ye are a miracle, a livin' miracle o' patience and long-suffering an' tender mercy, preachin' a sermon to us day by day that micht bring us nearer Heaven.'

'I must go,' he said then, without answer or comment. 'Good-night, friend; there are few like you in this weary world. You'll maybe ken some day what ye have been to me an' mine, an' that but for the aroma of Heaven that sanctifies this place I should have faltered by the way, ay, and fallen, oftener than I have done all these years.'

He left her as suddenly as he had come, but a painful impression remained in the mind of the mistress of Stanerigg, and that night she could not sleep.

It was three miles from Stanerigg to the doctor's house, which stood in its own grounds above the village, whose steep, unlovely street its upper windows overlooked. But beyond that a wide, flat plain, rich in cornland, stretched for many miles, and was a perpetual source of joy and satisfaction to those who could see the beauty of its ever-varying scene.

'Just wait a minute, Willie, till I see what's in,'

he said, as they neared the gate, and it was the first word he had spoken since they left Stanerigg. 'If it's a far road, you'll need to take the other beast. I would be better pleased to find nothing.'

'So wad I,' replied Willie, and the doctor vaulted with his accustomed nimbleness from the gig, passed through the gateway, and crossed the paved courtyard to the surgery door. Directly he turned the door-handle some one flew to meet him, as if she had been watching eagerly.

'How late you are, papa; how is dear Mrs. Haldane?'

'All right; a fine son, Elsie. I've been claver-ing at Stanerigg. Anything in?'

'Yes, two messages,' she answered, as she turned on the gas. 'One urgent from Handasydes' Row; Robert Annan's wife, and a boy from the Cleugh to say one of Glover's bairns is ill.'

'I'm not going back to the Cleugh this night, my woman,' he answered placidly. 'But I'll need to go straight on to Handasydes. Take down this prescription first for Mrs. Haldane. The groom is to come for it at half-past nine.'

She pulled out the little desk flap, and wrote to her father's dictation, asking not a single question.

What Elsie Gourlay was to her father it is impossible for me to say. When her school-days were over she had loved to be with him in his surgery of an evening, and so had picked up the knowledge which now enabled her to save him so much labour. Every bottle of medicine that left the doctor's house was made up by his daughter's own hands. She was a very fair and lovable-looking creature, though laying no pretensions to beauty. She was short rather than tall, plumply built, and with a frank, open, pleasant face, and merry grey eyes. Her hair was her glory; great masses of ruddy brown, in which the sunshine played, and which curled naturally all round her broad, intelligent brow.

A wholesome, womanly nature shone in her frank eyes; her manner was without affectation or restraint; in a word, she was one of those women who create the atmosphere of home wherever they are.

‘That’s all; how’s your mother?’

‘All right. I think she’s gone to bed. She had a little headache when I got home.’

‘Nothing else?’

‘No, father.’

‘I’ll go up and see her. Run out and tell Willie it’s Handasydes’ Row; maybe he’ll have to leave me there.’

‘If mamma is asleep, may I drive you, daddy? Willie will be glad to get in to his supper.’

‘I daresay. Well, all right. I’d like that; and it’s a fine night. Get the medicine ready while I’m up-stairs.’

He pushed the green-baize door open, and entered the inner portion of the house which the surgery and waiting-rooms adjoined. It was a wide, commodious family house, comfortably furnished and well kept—a house which looked like a home. He went up the wide, softly-carpeted staircase rather wearily, and ere he crossed the threshold of his wife’s room, he drew his hand across his brow.

She was in bed, and the gas was turned full on.

‘I thought you had a headache, Bessie,’ he said kindly. ‘Hadn’t I better turn down the gas?’

‘No; I’ve just been out turning it up. I won’t be grudged a light in my own house? Where have you been all day?’

He stood by the side of the bed, and looked down at her with a curious expression on his face.

She had worn out his patience long ago, and hope had not these many years visited the doctor's house ; only endurance remained.

'I've been at Easterlaw. The heir was born at half-past seven. What have you had to-day, Bessie? Tell me that.'

'No, I won't.'

She spoke sullenly, and her brows were knit. Once upon a time Bessie Gourlay had been a comely and well-favoured woman, a joy to the eyes that beheld her, but not these many days.

'Shall I give you something for your headache. or to make you sleep?'

'No ; I'm afraid of your drugs. I believe you'll give me poison to get rid of me some day, you and Elsie between you.'

He was accustomed to such speeches, and they had but little effect on him.

'Well, if you won't, I must be off,' he said, good-humouredly. 'Good-night, wife ; it's just possible I may be out half the night.'

'You can stop out the whole night, if you like, for me,' she said irritably. 'It'll be nothing more than I've been accustomed to all my life.'

Talking to a woman in such a mood was neither

pleasant nor profitable, so the doctor went downstairs.

‘She’s had a drop of something while you were at Stanerigg, Elsie ; but she’ll soon be asleep.’

‘I won’t go if you think she might need me, father,’ said the girl, as she deftly placed the bottle in its white wrapper and sealed it close.

‘Oh, I think you can go right enough. Mina will watch her. Come then, lass ; poor Mrs. Annan may be needing me sorely by now.’

Elsie did not keep him long. Her tweed driving cape and felt hat hung in the cloakroom off the hall ; in five minutes they were side by side in the gig, and the horse’s head turned westward from the village. Generally they had a great deal to say to each other when they got out together, but that night the doctor was unusually quiet.

‘Are you not quite well, father, or only very tired ?’ Elsie asked at last, weary of the long silence.

‘Neither, bairn, but thoughts lie deep in my heart the night. I don’t know what ails me, to go back on them as I am doing,’ he said, rousing himself with a start. ‘There’s a session-meeting in the Free Kirk to-night about the vacancy.’

'Yes, father,' said Elsie; and in the darkness the colour rose in her cheek.

'They tell me that Angus Fleming is a candidate; is it true?'

'I believe so, father,' Elsie answered, and her hand trembled on the reins.

'Steady, lassie; so it's that serious, is it?' he said slowly. 'Well, if he should be elected, and you still of the same mind, ye can bid him speir again. I believe I was too hasty before, but the Gourlays have aye been proud o' their descent. God help us, the best o' us have but little to be proud of.'

Elsie could not speak, but her soft eyes glowed in the harvest moonlight, to which they did no shame.

Then silence fell upon them, and the gig rolled smoothly along the high road till the great black mounds of Handasydes' pits came in view, and the ugly, monotonous rows of miners' houses. They stood back a little from the road, with long strips of garden ground before them, varying in tidiness and tasteful arrangement according to the individuality of each tenant. It was a very tidy and pretty garden before which the doctor's gig

drew up, and where an anxious man was waiting at the gate.

‘Eh, doctor, I’m thankful you’ve come,’ he said, with a breath of relief.

‘All right, Annan. Just wait, Elsie. I’ll be out in a little to tell you whether I’m likely to be detained.’

It was about fifteen minutes before he came back from the house, but to Elsie the time had seemed very short.

‘I may be here half the night, lassie, for two hours at least, so you had better go home.’

‘And send Willie back about midnight?’

‘No, I’ll walk; and go you to your bed and sleep. Good-night, Elsie.’

Something in the upturned face went to the girl’s heart. She had never seen such a look, nor had read so plainly how dear she was to his heart.

‘Dear daddy, I will never do anything to vex you,’ she cried, with a strange catch in her breath.

‘You never have. You are the sunshine of my life, bairn,’ he replied, and reached up easily to kiss her downbent face. Now such endearments

were not common between these two, though they loved each other passing well, and the mystery of her father's demeanour dwelt with the girl as she drove solitarily along the roads. But before she had reached home, other thoughts, not less sweet, had banished the fleeting wonder, and the future seemed wholly bright to her, by reason of the words her father had spoken concerning Angus Fleming, who loved her and whom she loved, though they were presently on probation in obedience to her father's desire.

Elsie found her mother asleep, and there being no inducement for her to remain up, she went to bed, and before eleven o'clock was fast asleep.

No one heard the doctor return, and the night passed, wrapping in its folds a sad tragedy which the morning light revealed.

Soon after six o'clock Mina, the faithful servant who had served the house for many years, and knew all its sorrows, came hurriedly to Elsie's door.

'Get up, Miss Elsie; a terrible thing has happened,' she cried, totally unable to control herself.

'What?' cried the girl confusedly. 'Is it mamma? What has she done?'

‘No, no ; it’s the doctor ; he’s in his room sitting by the table, and we canna waken him.’

Elsie never knew how she got on her dressing-gown and slippers, but in a few seconds she flew to her father’s room. And there he was, sitting by the table, with his head laid upon his folded arms as if asleep. He had been writing, evidently, for the pen had fallen from his hand upon the written page, where it had made a blot. Elsie ran to his side, but when her hand touched his temple she started back, for that chill was the chill of death.

‘He’s dead, Mina ; run or send Jessie for Dr. Rattray,’ she said in a still, strange voice. ‘Something might be done ; but, oh, I am sure he is dead.’

‘What’s all this fuss about, and what’s the matter with you all ?’ said a querulous voice in the doorway. ‘I’ve rung three times for my tea, and I’d like to know why nobody thinks it worth while to answer my bell.’

Mrs. Gourlay came into the room, an untidy, unlovely figure in a tawdry dressing-gown, and her black hair hanging on her shoulders. Her face was red and unsightly, her eyes heavy and

dazed-looking. Her daughter saw at a glance that she was scarcely sober, and a terrible resentment surged in her heart, and she felt as if she must wrap her arms round the stooping figure at the table to save it from the desecration of her touch. For she knew that the long strain of his wife's degradation had broken her father's heart at last.

'He's dead, mother, quite dead,' she said quietly. 'I have sent Mina for Dr. Rattray; but I am sure he is dead. You can come and see for yourself.'

The poor creature, sobered for the moment, staggered forward with a terror-stricken face. But when she looked at the face against which Elsie's white cheek rested so lovingly, she gave a shriek of terror and fled the room; and for several hours she was forgotten. The neighbouring doctor, with whom the dead man had worked in harmony for a score of years, obeyed the summons immediately, and directly he entered the room, shook his head, betraying no surprise.

'He has long expected a call like this, my dear,' he said, pityingly, to the girl. 'We both knew he would not die in his bed, and it is as he would have wished; he has died in harness.'

She was so stunned she could make no reply. How she lived through that day and those which followed she never knew. The light of the house was gone, and the darkness of death brooded over it. It was no ordinary bereavement no ordinary loss, that Elsie Gourlay had sustained, and she went about the house dry-eyed and calm, finding her chief comfort in sitting quietly by the bed in which lay the noble figure, the fine face beautiful in the majesty of death. It was when they took him away that the blackness of desolation seemed to fall with awful distinctness on her heart. When the sad procession moved away from the door of the house, she shut herself in the study, feeling desperately that she must have some reprieve from the garrulous, unceasing wailings of her mother, who had never risen from her bed since her husband's death. The study in which father and daughter had spent so many happy hours, each sufficient to the other, was as he had left it, and for the first time she had courage to look at the last words his fingers had penned. They were written upon a sheet of paper left lying in the open page of the Bible which had been his constant companion. The first tears she had

shed welled in her eyes as she read the words which were addressed to her.

‘My dear lassie,’ they began, ‘there is a queer feeling upon me that this is my last night on earth, and if it be the Lord’s will, so be it. I would leave you my blessing, for all you have been to me since you came a helpless bairn to bless this house. I bespeak, should you be left to care for your poor mother, that you give to her the like care and love you have given to me, and if the time should come when you can become the wife of Angus Fleming, my blessing rest upon you both. Standing at the door, as Mrs. Gray put it to me this very night, these distinctions of birth and upbringing seem but as dust before the wind. But the probation will do neither you nor him any harm. To see you in the Free Manse of Faulds would indeed please me well, among the folk that have known you all your days; for there are no friends like those of bairn days. The Lord has prospered me, and there is more than enough for you and your mother all your days. And that thought gives me peace, for it is an ill thing to see women warstlin’ with the world. And now, my dear bairn, farewell, till the Lord shall set us

together in His high place, if it be that one so unworthy as I be so lifted up. And yet I fear not, for I know in whom I have believed. In the chapter I have just been reading, the fourteenth of John, you will find the comfort that has never failed me yet, but——'

Here the words ended abruptly, and the blot from the fallen pen blurred the page. Alongside the written words Elsie read the printed message from the Book her father had so loved. And it sufficed.

'Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In My Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am ye may be also.'

IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

1 THE Free Church of Faulds suffered much after the translation of Neil Denham to a city charge. Under his ministry they had enjoyed a period of exceptional prosperity, both spiritually and materially, and when he left them a kind of numbness seemed to settle down upon them. The usual formalities were gone through, and a successor duly elected—one who was unfortunately totally unsuited to the place. The congregation consisted of farmers, the majority of the tradespeople, and a large number of miners, especially those employed at Handasydes' pits, the manager of which was a very upright, God-fearing man, who exercised the very best influence upon his men. It was often said that had the Ladyford Company been as fortunate in their manager, Faulds would have been a standing example to all mining communities. Neil Denham was the son of working

people; and that fact, coupled with his large and rare gift of sympathy, gave him a very special hold on working folks. His successor was a totally different man—in a word, his ministry at Faulds was a failure, and he never afterwards spoke of the place but with extreme bitterness; whereas Denham often said his ministry there was the happiest period of his life. Three years after Denham's translation the church was vacant again, and they seemed in no hurry to fill it. It was nearly eleven o'clock that night when Mr. Gray of Stanerigg returned from the session-meeting, which had been a pretty lively one. Listening to his account of the proceedings, his wife forgot for the moment her pressing concern about Dr. Gourlay. ✓

'Laidlaw an' Tam Henderson and Alec Glover are all against Angus Fleming getting a hearing, Lisbeth. What wad you think?'

'I dinna see what for the lad shouldna get a hearin' wi' the lave,' she said quickly. 'He is a guid lad, and I hear he is clever. We ocht to hear him preach.'

'Laidlaw says Mrs. Laidlaw couldna thole to listen to him in the pulpit, kennin' what he is, an'

that he has a bonnie stock o' impidence to upset himsel' to the position ; and his faction of course a' agreed. Then Cairncross the manager made a very sensible speech, sayin' that a man shouldna be made to suffer for the accident o' his birth. Westerlaw said 'Hear, hear' at this, an' fegs, so did I. I canna thole thae Laidlaws at ony price ; they're as purse-prood as peacocks. An' the lang an' the short o't is, he's to preach on Sabbath aicht days. What's your mind, Lisbeth ? D'ye think the kirk an' the folk wad be likely to grow in grace under Jean Fleming's son ?'

Stanerigg looked rather anxiously at his wife, for the sphere of church and religious life was peculiarly her own, and her judgment had never been known to err. She knitted for a few minutes in silence.

'It is a bitter thing for a lad to be born oot o' wedlock, father. I ken very little aboot him, but I ken his mither weel ; an' she has nobly redeemed her character, an' I honour her above the lave. For her sake I wad thole a heap, even in the pulpit o' my ain kirk.'

'Then ye're for him,' said Stanerigg, quite briskly for him. 'So am I.'

Mrs. Gray smiled a bit quiet smile to herself, very well pleased; then she began to speak of the matter of which her own heart was full. She felt no great surprise to hear next day as they drove to church that the doctor had passed away. She got out of the gig at the familiar gateway to his house, and spent the hours of divine service beside the stricken girl, to whom her motherly heart was knit by the ties of no ordinary affection.

The early days of the following week were entirely given up to talk of the doctor's sudden death, but as the Sabbath-day drew near interest in the appearance of Angus Fleming in the Free Church began to revive. He lived, when not engaged in tutorial work, with his mother at the lodge-gates of Pitbraden, to which she had come, a young mother with her unacknowledged son, five-and-twenty years before. It was a very old story now, but the ashes of it were raked up again, and for two or three days nothing was talked of but Jean Fleming and the tragedy of her life.

'Now I wonder,' said Mrs. Gray to her husband as they drove along the high road, which was

bounded for a mile and more by the high stone walls shutting in the extensive policies of Pitbraden, 'I wonder whether ony o' the big folk will turn oot to hear Angus, an' what Mrs. Giles Braden and the Colonel are thinkin' o't.'

'Depend on it, they approve o't, Lisbeth,' said Stanerigg, 'or it wadna be. There's ower muckle excitement aboot the haill thing for a Sabbath day. D'ye no think it?'

'I only wish he may preach weel and gie to perishin' souls the meat they need,' she said earnestly, and with a scarcely perceptible sigh; and her eyes, as they roamed the rich expanse of corn-land, which was a mass of golden sheaves, the wheat-fields gleaming ruddily in the sun, had a deep and yearning glance in them, which had its own sad meaning. For she had had her own dreams concerning the Free Church of Faulds, and all that was left to her was the message which had come from the far prairies of Iowa and the thought of that distant grave.

The lodge at the Pitbraden gate was a roomy and picturesque house exquisitely kept. The door was shut, but a lazy curl of blue smoke ascended to the sky, and Mrs. Gray wondered

whether Angus Fleming's mother's courage had failed her at the end. A good few stragglers were now visible in the road, increasing in numbers as they neared the confines of the village. Many a salutation passed between the pedestrians and the Stanerigg gig, which turned in at the doctor's road, as it was familiarly called, it being the custom for the Grays to put up their horse in the doctor's stable. While her husband was busy with the animal, Mrs. Gray went round to the front door for a word with Elsie. She found her standing listlessly on the steps, leaning against the pillared door, her face very wan and sad.

'Hoo's my bairn this mornin'?' asked Mrs. Gray; and for answer the girl burst into tears. All the morning the still and lovely Sabbath sunshine had seemed to mock her, and her heart had grown hard and bitter and rebellious; life seemed so empty—the whole earth so sad and desolate a place.

'His first Sabbath-day in heaven,' said Lisbeth Gray softly, not seeking in any way to stay the girl's natural grief. 'I can follow—a'most see him there. Ye'll no grudge him his hard-earned rest, bairn, efter a while.'

‘I don’t grudge it to him now, only I want him, oh, so terribly! How am I to live without him? Now life seems a living death, the house a grave. Will it always be like this?’ she cried passionately.

‘No. Even I can say noo, It is well, an’ mine was a harder case. Your dear father, like Enoch, walked wi’ the Lord, an’ was not, for God took him. My laddie wandered long in the wilderness, and I ken naething for certain, excep’ that the Lord is fu’ o’ tender mercy, an’ has aye been to me and mine.’

‘But I am not so good as you, dear Mrs. Gray. Things seem so hard when one is young. It is terrible to give up. Perhaps by-and-by God will teach me to be like you.’

Mrs. Gray made no reply, for there was a lump in her throat.

‘I’ll come in when I come doon, my dear,’ she said, turning about abruptly. ‘Very weel do I ken your thochts will be whiles wi’ us up by. Ye ken wha’s to preach the day?’

Elsie nodded, and through the paleness of her cheek the colour slowly rose. Then the dear mistress of Stanerigg turned away with an earnest

prayer at her heart, that if God saw fit so to bind up the bleeding heart, it might find in a new earthly tie some balm for the rending of the old. She and her husband spoke little as they walked the short distance to the church. When they turned the farther corner of the doctor's road into the highway again, they saw it black with the folk thronging to the churches, all three being in the same direction, and standing not far apart from each other.

Just as they approached the door, they discerned among the throng the tall figure of Angus Fleming with his mother on his arm. She was a slight, thin person, and there was visible, Mrs. Gray thought, in her very carriage and gait that morning, a certain hesitation and shame. She was very plainly dressed in a black gown, a plaid of shepherd's tartan, and a quiet and becoming bonnet draped by a thick veil.

In years she looked about sixty, though she was in reality nearly ten years younger. Angus Fleming walked into the church, put her in her seat, and then came out again to enter by the vestry door. The Grays met him in the porch, and Mrs. Gray was moved to shake him by the

hand and bid him God-speed, with a look in her face which seemed to him like a message of encouragement from heaven. She was one of those rare beings who are moved to say the right word and do the right deed when most fitting and needful. Many a cup of cold water had she thus given to thirsty souls whose need was revealed to her through her own great sympathy, her large and loving insight into the sorrows of others.

There had never been seen such a congregation in Faulds Free Church since the day Neil Denham preached his farewell sermon. It was crowded in every part, many members of the other churches being present. In a seat near the door sat Colonel Braden and his sister-in-law, a widow, deeply veiled. Punctually at the hour Andrew Herdman, the beadle, took up the books, and then went back to the vestry door. He belonged to the Laidlaw faction in the kirk, and therefore was against Angus Fleming's candidature. He showed his disapproval in the very way he stood, his head held high in protest, and his dark face wearing its dourest look. But nobody had any attention to pay to him when the preacher came out by the vestry door and ascended the steps to the pulpit,

where the door was shut upon him with a distinct snap by the protesting Andrew Herdman. After a moment's breathless silence he stood up to give out the opening psalm. Every eye was fixed upon him ; but it was as if the lad were upheld by an unseen power, for though he was deadly pale, his voice did not falter as he read the lines :

‘Such pity as a father hath
Unto his children dear.’

As he stood there in his loneliness, conscious of the critical and disapproving attitude of the majority in the seats before him, the nobility and manliness of his bearing made itself felt through the entire congregation. He was eight-and-twenty, and looked his age ; his brow was marked by the lines of hard study, and in his eyes was the reflection of the sad look which dwelt perpetually on his mother's face. There was strength as well as sweetness in the lines about the grave mouth, and the upper lip, being clean shaven, showed its full character. More than one glance went from the pulpit to the back pew where sat Colonel Braden, and to the discerning the resemblance between him and the preacher was undeniable.

Many a head that was bent to the first prayer in a kind of inward and unuttered scorn of the preacher who was to lead them, fell lower as he spoke, and a hush as of an holy place fell upon them all. For the most flippant and frivolous present felt that this man, even in his youth, had learned to walk with God as a near and precious Friend. Some wept quiet tears of thankfulness as each need of their heart was expressed in simple language they could understand.

By the time the prayer was ended there was a different atmosphere in the church, and when the text was given out there was not one inattentive countenance or ear. He chose a verse from the thirty-ninth psalm: 'Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.'

Not since the days of Neil Denham had such a soul-searching discourse been delivered from that pulpit. Those who had known Angus Fleming all his days, who had seen him a laddie at the school, and watched carelessly his sure growth, listened in amazement, spell-bound by the wisdom, breadth, and ripeness of his spiritual experience

and his marvellous knowledge of the human heart. The secret sins of many rose up before them in a thousand accusing shapes. Tam Laidlaw shifted uneasily in his seat, disturbed by the thought of his mixed teas and sanded sugars, and even his flippant wife wished she had not given her servants stale fish for their breakfast that morning. Will Henderson, the Pitbraden gardener, glared at the preacher from under his bushy eyebrows, and wondered whether he could by any means jalouse how much of the garden produce was secretly disposed of out of the Colonel's knowledge. But after ruthlessly laying bare as with a surgeon's scalpel the frailty of the human heart, his own seemed to melt within him as he pointed the pathway of penitence and peace and dwelt upon the transcendent love of God. His eyes glowed, his face shone, his voice became mellifluous with the intensity of his feeling ; and a strange awe crept over the people, because they felt that he had forgotten them and was alone with his Maker, even face to face.

While her son was speaking, the sad face of Jean Fleming gradually cleared, and Lisbeth Gray observed that joy and thankfulness had

robbed the bitter past of its awful sting. For now Angus was lifted away and beyond the stigma of his birth, and had found his heritage, which was to be an honoured bearer of the gospel of peace.

The closing psalm was somewhat falteringly sung, and the people dispersed more decorously and quietly than was their wont.

‘Gang into the vestry, father,’ whispered Lisbeth Gray to her husband, ‘and tell Angus Fleming he is a chosen vessel, and that the Lord has a mighty work for him to do in this place.’

And Stanerigg went in, nothing loth, for he had gotten more heart that day than he had got since his own lad fell away from grace, and he could even share his wife’s sure and certain hope that all was well. And for that reason gratitude welled deep and strong towards the man who had given him a cup of strength in an hour of need. The people did not hurry away from the door, but hung about in knots of two and three discussing what they had heard. The feeling seemed to be general that, whatever formalities might still be gone through, Angus Fleming of the people’s choice was the minister-elect of the

Free. The Pitbraden folk sat in their carriage at the kirk-gate, but the coachman had apparently gotten orders to wait, for it stood still. And shortly, to the great wonderment and excitement of such as were a witness to it, when Angus Fleming brought his mother out by the door, even as he had taken her in, the Colonel leaped from the carriage and held open the door; and before they could demur or refuse, they were within, and the horses' heads turned down the brae. And that of itself was enough to make town's talk for a goodly space in Faulds.

'Well, I never,' said Mrs. Laidlaw, tossing her head. 'I don't call that seemly, anyhow. But it's a fitting end to the morning's farce.'

Now Mrs. Gray was passing at the moment, and she could not let such a remark go unchallenged.

'Wad ye ca' a baptism o' the Spirit a farce, Mistress Laidlaw? God forgie ye that ye should be so blind.'

There was a kind of armed neutrality always between the two women, who as a rule confined themselves strictly to a bare interchange of civilities. The Laidlaws were great folk in

Faulds, having the largest grocery establishment in the place. They had built a brand new villa on a desirable site, and Mrs. Laidlaw no longer attended behind the counter, as in the early days of her career, when she had been a more humble-minded and a better woman. They were feared rather than beloved in the place, too many of the improvident and the thriftless being hopelessly under their heel. It was true of them that they had waxed fat and prosperous by usury and underhand dealing, though no specific charge could be made against them.

At this protest of Mrs. Gray, Lucky Laidlaw, as she was familiarly called, tossed her head and shrugged her ample shoulders, which were well covered by a handsome velvet mantle direct from Paris.

‘There’s two ways of looking at a thing always,’ she said pertly; ‘and as for them riding home in the Pitbraden carriage, I call it nothing short of an insult to respectable folks.’

Mrs. Gray’s colour rose, and a sore anger burned within her. Gentle and sweet and even-tempered as a rule, yet she was quick and passionate when occasion demanded it, and

Lucky Laidlaw seemed to rouse all the evil in her.

'I can't think what Colonel Braden means by such a thing, and one is tempted to suspect something. Do you happen to have heard the ins and outs of how Jean Fleming happened to come to Pitbraden lodge? If you have, you might enlighten me.'

'I'll tell ye if ye want to ken,' said Mrs. Gray quietly, putting a curb on herself, though with something of an effort. 'Nearly thirty years syne Colonel Braden's youngest brother, Frank, was at college at St. Andrews, and Jeanie Fleming was the dochter of the weedy woman he lodged wi'. Ye've maybe heard how he was taken ill wi' typhoid fever an' died there, Jeanie nursing him to the end. Efter he was awa' an' it was found hoo things were wi' her, the Colonel brocht her to the lodge and took upon himsel' the education o' the bairn. An' it was a Christian act for which God has rewarded him this day. As for his mither, her life has been an open book sinsyne, an' some o's micht dae waur than take a verse frae that pure page. She has atoned even as she has suffered for the sin o' her youth. I bid ye guid-mornin', and I wad

recommend you, Mistress Laidlaw, to tak a quiet hour wi' Paul this efternune, and see what he has to say on the heid o' charity.'

So saying, Lisbeth Gray deliberately stepped back to meet her husband, who was walking with Mr. Cairncross and discussing the service. So disturbed was she in her mind that the sweet savour of the Sabbath morning seemed to have departed, and only the littleness and meanness of human nature bounded her mental vision. It was not indeed until she had been on her knees in her own room that a measure of serenity returned to her.

Meanwhile the two who were being so variously discussed had reached their own quiet home, and shut the door. There Jean Fleming laid off her bonnet with hands which trembled very much. When the thick veil was removed, a very sweet if somewhat worn and anxious face was revealed, the face of a woman who had lived her whole life under a cloud. Angus had seated himself by the window and leaned his elbow on the ledge, his dark head touching the flaming scarlet of the geraniums which flourished, as most things did, under Jean Fleming's fostering care. She glanced

at him anxiously and with quivering lips, afraid to speak, and misunderstanding altogether his abstracted and silent demeanour. He was only oppressed, as rare and highly-strung natures so often are, by a sense of his own unfitness, and the futility of his own effort. He had given them the best that was in him, delivering his message according to the measure of his own light, and he felt no elation over what he had done, but the reverse.

And the woman who had suffered for him, and consecrated him with many penitent tears from the sad hour of his birth, felt her heart breaking, and feared to speak.

‘Mother,’ he said suddenly, ‘why don’t you speak, and tell me how I did? Is it that you think I fear blame? I will get plenty of it yet; but it is only yours I fear—yours and God’s.’

Then a strange light broke over her face, and she cast herself sobbing at his feet, clasping his knees with her hands, hiding her face

‘O Angus, my son, my son! God has anointed you, and set you far, far above me. And I never knew till to-day how terrible is the wrong I have done you. You are born to be a king among

men, and through me you are humbled to the very dust. Forgive me, forgive me, my own laddie, that has lain on my breast.'

'Hush, mother! My God, I cannot bear to hear you! You have never humbled me. A man can only humble himself,' he said, and his strong face worked in uncontrollable anguish. 'I love you as my own soul, and God grant I may be able to be all I should be to you. Let us pray to Him together.'

God was with them in that holy place, and they were lifted above earthly passion and earthly blame, ay, and earthly praise, and felt about them only the serene and high atmosphere of heaven.

Blessed are they to whom such vision is vouchsafed, even once, as they pilgrimage through this weary world. Most of us are only hampered by our feet of clay.

ONE OF THE WEAK THINGS OF
THE WORLD

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ABOUT two miles from Stanerigg, on the sea-board side of the parish, was the extensive farm of Barleyknowe. It was considered one of the finest farms in that rich farming county ; it had not a cold patch or a hungry furrow on it ; and being in the hands of a capable agriculturist who understood the whims and moods of every acre on it, returned full measure, pressed down, and running over. In the spring, when the sowers were busy in the wide fields, the upturning of the rich soil with that reddish tinge on it which tells its own tale to the understanding eye ; in early summer, when the braird was fresh and green on every furrow ; or later, when the rich breadths of standing corn took on the gold before its wealth became the reapers' prey, it was a sight to make glad the heart of the man who tilled it with such sympathy and care. Land is a queer thing to

deal with, and requires as careful handling as any bairn at its mother's knee. It seems almost human, whiles, in its responsive understanding of the fostering bestowed on it, or the reverse. You could not find in all that bonnie countryside a more desirable and bieldy home than the farmhouse of Barleyknowe. It was no mean dwelling, but substantial and even imposing, as befitted the holding it represented, the rent of which, paid as each Martinmas came round, ran well into the four figures. But nobody called it dear at that, least of all the man who paid it cheerfully as the appointed day came round, though as a rule he was not a cheerful payer by any means.

Fortune had smiled on David Cargill in one sense, and frowned bitterly on him in another. For while his coffers grew steadily fuller, his heart and home remained empty and desolate, the man's whole life blighted by the terrible disappointment of his early manhood. Romances were not very common, perhaps, in that prosaic neighbourhood, though some were to be found by those interested in the byways of human experience; but the romance of David Cargill's life was one which made more than a nine days' wonder

in Faulds. Perhaps romance is hardly the word to use; had you asked him, he would probably, had he elected to answer you at all, have called the most bitter experience of his life by a different name. Anyhow, it had changed him from a happy-hearted, blithe-natured youth into a crabbed old man, who shunned his kind and took but little pleasure in his life. He was not old yet; his years scarce numbered forty; but time had been cruel to the tenant of the Barleyknowe. There were very many who recalled the David Cargill of the earlier time, and who were wae over the sad change; but his love-story was almost forgotten in the quick sequence of events, which in this world press so thick on each other's heels that only the latest is of interest.

Queer stories were told about the lonely and hermit life led by the tenant of the Barleyknowe, in the great house which stood in a green meadow looking to the sea, whose shimmer could be seen from the upper windows had there been any one to open the shutters or draw the blinds. But year in, year out, the rooms, which everybody knew were full of fine furniture, that had been bought for the new wife who never set eyes on it, were

shut up, never even opened to be cleaned or aired. David Cargill and his attached housekeeper, a sonsy middle-aged woman, who had been a housemaid with his mother, dwelt in the lower portion of the house, and on the stairs or in the upper chambers no footstep ever fell.

One night in the middle of harvest, David Cargill lay tossing on his bed, and could not sleep. He had nothing on his mind, no harassing anxiety concerning farm matters. The weather was superb, and already half his grain had been secured in prime condition. In all the years he had farmed the Barleyknowe, he had never ingathered a more bountiful and glorious harvest. Nor did heat or closeness of atmosphere oppress him; it was a fine clear night, with a south wind blowing, and the moon the reapers love riding high and lovely in a sky studded with a million stars. The white gleam of it crept round the edges of the blind, and made two long arrows of silver on the floor. David Cargill lay watching them and thinking of the moons of long ago. Suddenly a strange sound fell upon his ears, a sound which made him raise himself on his elbow, and listen with strained ears for its

repetition. And presently it rang out again clearly and distinctly on the still night air, the cry of a little child in terror or distress. He sprang out of bed, and drawing up the blind, threw up the window as far as it would go. But though he stretched himself half out of the window, he could see nothing, and the cry was not repeated. It was light enough to discern objects a good way off, and he saw by the subdued light which lay on the horizon where it met the solemn grey light of the sea that the dawn was at hand. He stood still a moment, thinking he must have dreamed the sound, since it did not come again, and all the dogs were still. He shut down the window and went back to bed, and almost immediately he heard the cry again, subdued this time into a plaintive wail. It took him only about three minutes to get into his clothes, and throwing up the window, he vaulted out upon the gravel, which crunched beneath his heavy tread. A wide lawn smooth and green stretched before the house door, and was fringed by a thick shrubbery overshadowed beyond by the tall trees of the wood which sheltered the Barleyknowe homestead so well from north and east. Through this shrubbery he

searched carefully, and even entered the wood itself, for the sound had seemed to come from there. But he found nothing, and presently wandered back again to the front of the house; and by now the sheep-dogs were barking in their shed, and the cocks beginning to crow. Suddenly he saw an apparition on his very doorstep, within the porch, a little bairn supporting himself unsteadily on a pair of very fat legs, and whimpering with his finger in his rosebud of a mouth.

Now David Cargill, though he had shunned the companionship of his fellow-men these many years, loved little children, and was beloved of them everywhere. They said he was an exacting master, that he drove hard bargains, and was very near in all his dealings; but nobody had ever heard him utter a harsh word to a bairn, or to a woman with bairns about her knee, and he had been known to do many an act of thoughtful kindness such as would have occurred to few, and always it would be found that a bairn was at the bottom of it. Therefore when he beheld the waif on his doorstep, the strong heart of the man melted within him, and he spoke to him gently as a mother might have done. After the first

startled glance at him, the bairn crept to him joyfully, seeking his hand with his own chubby one, and the heartbroken look so pitiful to see on a bairn's face was lost in a confident and expectant smile as he suffered David Cargill to lift him in his arms.

‘Hulloa, whaur hae ye come frae, an’ where’s your mother, my man?’ he asked; then the little red lips quivered sadly, and a yearning ‘Mam. mam,’ came up pitifully from his very heart.

‘Never mind, never mind,’ said David Cargill, soothingly. ‘We’ll go in and get some milk, my wee man, and your mam will come the morn.’

He tried the handle of the door, but presently remembered how he had come out, and that it was locked from within. There was nothing for it but to go back the way he had come, which appeared to divert the bairn very much, for he laughed aloud, and the sound was like the music of the spheres in the ears of that lonely man, who had no tie of kinship with any now on the face of the earth. All fear seemed to have died out of the child’s heart, and he began to chatter while his protector lit the lamp, in a language the tenant of the Barleyknowe had not kept up, though he

had himself spoken it in his infancy, but it was sufficient to establish a friendly understanding between them. So engrossed were they with each other that they did not see the shadow which fell across the window for one brief instant, the yearning glance from a pair of somewhat wild eyes, nor hear the bursting sob with which a mother's heart renounced her all.

By this time the dogs seemed to be thoroughly aroused, and were making a terrible riot in the quiet of the morning, but their master paid no heed to them. Taking the little lamp in one hand and the bairn's hand in the other, he went away to the door of his housekeeper's room, and knocked loudly. 'Get up, Susan, wummin, an' pit something on. A queer thing has happened. I've found a bairn at the door, an' ye'll need to see to him or the morn onyhoo.'

'Guid sakes,' he heard Susan mutter as she leaped from her bed ; but she did not keep him waiting many minutes.

Having roused her, David Cargill proceeded to the kitchen where he set the lamp on the table and broke up the gathering-coal so that a ruddy blaze danced suddenly on the walls and floor. A

huge pot hung on the 'swee' above the fire filled with water to make porridge for the shearers by half-past five in the morning. A sonsy black cat sat blinking drowsily on the fender-end, and in him—called of Susan Scott a thief, and a deil, and sundry other opprobrious names—the waif seemed to find a friend. He flew to him ecstatically, gripping him round the neck in no very gentle fashion, and the queer thing was that the cat did not resent such treatment, but appeared to relish it rather than otherwise. And this was the sight Susan Scott beheld as she entered the kitchen, buttoning up her cotton short-gown—her master sitting on the edge of the table, and a little bairn in a red tartan frock hugging the deil on the fender-end.

'Mercy me, maister,' said she; 'what's a' this? It's some o' the gangrel gipsies I saw i' the wud at the rasps yesterday left her bairn to gie her a free hand. But we'll set the police on her at the dawin'.'

Now Susan Scott had a very sharp tongue, but the heart beating in her ample bosom was a woman's heart, ay, and a mother's. A mother she might have been long ago, but for the love

she bore the name and the house she had so long served. And though many had asked her to wed, she had said no to them all. At sight of the little bairn, with the ruddy flames dancing on his curly pow, and round red cheeks, she ran to him and gathered him to her heart.

'I dinna think he's a gangrel wean, do you, Susan?' her master asked.

'Deed no; he's ower clean an' weel guidet; but what's this?'

A little scrap of paper which had escaped David Cargill's eye was pinned to the white pinafore at the back, and these words were written on it in an educated hand, though they had evidently been written hurriedly:

'For God's sake keep the bairn. His name is Robin.'

'The mother o' him's in trouble, maister,' observed Susan shrewdly. 'But what for should she leave him here?'

'Guid only kens,' answered David Cargill, and put the scrap of paper in his pocket-book.

'Well, I'll leave him to you, Susan; it's but three o'clock, an' I hinna had a wink o' sleep.'

‘I’ll tak’ care o’ him. Eh, but he’s a bonnie wee man, an’ no’ a bit strange.’

David Cargill went back to his bed, and, contrary to his own expectation, fell sound asleep, and never woke till Susan called him that his breakfast was ready, at seven o’clock. Conscious of a new interest in life, though he could not precisely remember it at the moment, he got up quickly and dressed, glad to see the sunshine and to notice that there was no dew on the grass, so that the leading would go on without delay.

‘Well, what about the bairn, Susan?’ he asked, as she brought his porridge into the sitting-room.

‘Oh, he’s sleepin’; never stirred since I gied him a joog o’ milk at fowr o’clock. Eh, he’s a canty wean, an’ she’s a hizzie that left him; but what are ye gaun to dae wi’ him?’

‘I’ll see about it, efter I’ve had my breakfast and been to the field. Are they startit?’

‘Ay, half an hour ago; it’s as dry as a whustle, Adam Broon says. He’s in grand fettle, an’ says this minds him on the harvests that were in his young days, when you could leave a cairt haut load i’ the field a’ nicht. There surely canna be muckle girnin’ at kirk or market this year.’

After a hearty breakfast, David Cargill paid a visit to the field and the stackyard, where all was going merrily, Adam Broon, who had been grieve at Barleyknowe for well-nigh forty years, beaming as if he had had a fortune left him. But some strange attraction drew him back to the house in less than an hour, and he arrived to find the bairn up and running about as if the place belonged to him. The fine, clear light of day, trying to older faces sometimes, only showed up the delicate pink softness and the exquisite rounded lines of that sweet baby face; and when the sun shone on his curly head it glinted like gold. There was neither fear nor strangeness in him; he went from one to the other, smiling upon all; and mostly there was a tear in Susan Scott's eye as she watched him. For she understood well the significance of that curious softness in her master's eye, and the memory of the unforgotten sorrow that had desolated the Barleyknowe, and soured as gentle a heart as ever beat in man's breast, lay with renewed heaviness on her soul.

'It's a blithe thing a bairn aboot the hoose, Susan,' he said. 'He maun bide a bit or we see.'

So saying, he took himself off, and happening

to look out a little later, Susan beheld him striding across the stubble in the direction of Stanerigg. Now Friday was Mrs. Gray's churning day, and she was very busy in the dairy when her maid Ailie said Mr. Cargill wanted to speak to her.

'Fegs, he taks an ill time for a visit, Ailie,' observed Mrs. Gray, with a kind of vexed good-humour. 'See, lassie, finish this. It disna dae to leave the butter the noo, but I canna keep the crater waitin'. Ca' for your very life or I come back.'

She found the tenant of the Barleyknowe in the parlour, and after giving her good-morning, he told her briefly what strange visitant had come to them in the night-time.

'An' what am I to do wi' the bairn, Mrs. Gray? that's what I want to ken.'

'Keep him,' she answered with a little twinkle in her eye. 'I'm sure Susan Scott's heart's big enough, whatever yours may be. But maist likely the mither'll turn up again. I'd like to see the bairn. Maybe I'll rin ower in the gloamin'.'

'I dinna see hoo I can keep him,' said David Cargill dubiously. 'The Barleyknowe's nae place for a bairn.'

'It's big enough in a' conscience,' replied Mrs. Gray. 'But of course there's the puirhoose, an' naebody wad expect' you to keep the wean. Ye'd better send word to John Chisholm, the Inspector, and he'll tak' him awa'.'

'I'll wait or the morn,' he said, hesitatingly, 'if ye'll come ower.'

She looked at his big, well-knit figure, which had a stoop at the shoulders not brought there by age, at his grave, stern, grey-whiskered face, to which the deep eyes gave a kind of indescribable softness, and her heart yearned over him unspeakably. She saw him but seldom, and she had never dared to mention the sorrow of his youth to him, but her heart was full of it at the moment, and he knew it.

'Maybe, wha kens, the Lord has wark for the bairn to do at the Barleyknowe, Dauvit. He disna despise the weak things o' the world,' she said softly.

'Humph!' was all David Cargill answered, and went out by the door as if he had been shot at. But Lisbeth Gray knew that her words had gone home.

When she went over to the Barleyknowe in the

gloaming, she found that the matter was practically settled, Susan Scott and her master being of one mind concerning the bairn, that he should remain at the Barleyknowe, at least until his mother claimed him. So wee Robin found a home such as any king in Babyland might have envied him. Many were amused, and some sneered over the new regime, but none dared to make a disparaging remark to David Cargill concerning the waif he had taken to his heart and home. And after a time the talk died down, and nobody paid any heed, because they had grown accustomed to the sight of Curly-Pow, as they called him, sitting in the Barleyknowe gig. The observant saw the slow, sure change being wrought in the man, even to his outward cloak, which assumed something of the blithe cheerfulness of long ago.

Lisbeth Gray came and went a good deal between Stanerigg and the Barleyknowe, being the referee and the standby of Susan Scott in every little anxiety concerning the precious lamb who had crept into the Barleyknowe fold. So a year passed away, and Robin, or Robinie, or Curly-Pow (to all three and many other endearing

names did the bairn answer), grew straight, and tall, and sturdy as a young birk tree, and there were few things on earth he did not attempt to say and do. Fear was not in him, and Cargill delighted in his daring, liking nothing better than to set him suddenly on the barebacked colt, whose mane he would clutch with his fat fingers, every limb of him alive with delight. So, as I said, time sped on. ✓

One evening in the late autumn, after all the corn was ingathered, Mrs. Gray was taking her ease, in a low chair by her own fireside. The lamp was not lit yet, though the room was dark save for the ruddy flicker of the fire. Outside the rain was falling drearily, the monotonous drip, drip on the sodden leaves making a kind of pensive music in harmony with Lisbeth Gray's thoughts which were of the past and what might have been. Upon her sad reverie Ailie broke presently, bringing the lighted lamp.

'There's somebody at the back-door, ma'am, that wants to see you. Wull I bring her in?'

'Did she gie neither name nor business, lass? What looks she like?'

'Like—like a lady, I think; at least she

speaks like ane; but she's tired an' weary an' very wet.'

'Bring her in, and pit on the little kettle, lest the puir body wad be the better o' a cup o' tea.'

Ailie was not astonished, and departed to do her mistress's bidding. Rest and refreshment were never denied the weary at Stanerigg, nor comfort the sad, if it was in the power of the mistress to give it. She rose up as she heard the step in the passage, and when Ailie had pointed the room to the stranger—which was not needful, since she knew it, ay, in its every homely detail—she went back to her kitchen. The stranger was a tall, slender, delicate-looking figure, clad in black, through which the rain had sodden. An old felt hat sat on the tresses which once had shamed the sun's own radiance, and when she put back her veil Lisbeth Gray threw up her hands.

'Eh, guid sakes, Maisie Morrison, has it come to this?'

The woman nodded, and would have spoken, but a fit of coughing interrupted her. Mrs. Gray forbore to say another word until she had with her own hands taken the woman's sodden shawl from her shoulders, and then hastily opening the

sideboard, filled a glass of good port wine and made her drink it.

‘Eh, lassie, lassie!’ was all she said then, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

‘I came,’ said the woman, with a stronger note in her voice, ‘because I knew that you never turn anybody from your door uncomforted, no matter what their sorrow or their sin. Can you tell me anything about my bairn?’

‘Your bairn? what bairn?’

‘My little Robin. I left him at the Barley-knowe a year ago and more. I thought of leaving him here, but something bade me take him there. Is he well? Oh, I am afraid to go and ask, in case they have not been kind to him, or in case they tell me he is dead. I thought you would know.’

She spoke with a certain wildness of look and tone which touched Lisbeth Gray inexpressibly. She remembered this beaten woman in the pride of her youth and the wonderful beauty which had been her ruin; and though many a time and oft she had felt bitter against her because of the blight she had thrown on a good man’s life, at sight of her now all that bitterness died away, and only a divine compassion remained.

‘The bairn is a’ richt; he is the very sunlicht o’ the Barleyknowe. Eh, lassie, lassie, what micht hae been!’

The dull red colour flushed the woman’s pale cheek, and she raised her hand with a passionate gesture.

‘Hush, unless you want to kill me. Oh! I was wicked, but I have suffered. God, what have I suffered! Do you think that if I go over very humbly and ask at his back-door as a beggar might, that he will let me look on my little bairn and kiss his face? Then I will but thank him on my knees for his goodness, and creep away to die.’

Lisbeth Gray did not answer, for she could not. The misery ill-doing works in the world, as exemplified in this stricken woman, broke her heart and tied her tongue. Her silence was misunderstood by the wanderer, and her voice rose to an anguished wail:

‘Oh, Mrs. Gray! you are a mother yourself. You know this awful heart-hunger which is eating into me. Don’t be hard on me. I have not been a good woman, but even a bad woman loves her child.’

‘Wheesht, bairn, wheesht! ye shall see the

bairn, but not in the way ye say. I'll bring him here to you mysel', for not a fit will ye gang oot o' Stanerigg the nicht.'

She had her way. Within the hour Maisie Morrison was lying on a sofa in the spare bedroom of Stanerigg, clad in dry garments, and feeling gratefully the cheery benison of the fire Ailie's willing fingers had lighted, though having no idea what it all could mean. Then Mrs. Gray put on her waterproof, her goloshes over her thickest boots, and prepared to tramp the fields to the Barleyknowe. But she lingered a moment, anxious that she should first see her husband home in order to explain the thing to him. Presently she saw the gig lamps gleaming through the trees, and ran out to meet it.

'Is that you, Lisbeth? Whaur are ye gaun?'

'Get doon, faither, or I speak to ye,' she said hurriedly. 'D'ye mind o' Maisie Morrison, that was to have mairrit Dave Cargill, and that ran awa' wi' Geordie Ingram the sailor, the very week they were cried?'

'Ay, fine.'

'Weel, she's here, puir thing, an' she looks to me to be deein'. It's her bairn that's at the

Barleyknowe, an' I'm gaun to fetch him. She's in the spare room, an' dinna you gang near her or I come back.'

'Ye'll be gaun to walk, like as no'? What a wummin ye are, Lisbeth! if ye dinna dee on your feet it'll no' be your fault,' said Stanerigg. 'Here, Sandy, drive the mistress ower to the Barleyknowe, and wait or she be ready to come back.'

Lisbeth Gray gave her husband's arm a little grateful pat, he lifted her into the gig, and off they drove. All the way she never spoke to the wondering Sandy, but pondered the words she should speak to David Cargill; though having no doubt that God would send them to her at the fitting time.

The tenant of the Barleyknowe was at his tea and Robin with him at the table when Mrs. Gray came in. As her eyes fell on the sweet face of the bairn, a great wonder filled her at her own stupidity, for there were his mother's very eyes, and the hair of gold which had once been Maisie Morrison's pride.

'A queer thing has happened, David,' she began, without giving him time even to greet her. 'I've gotten Curly-Pow's mither at Stanerigg.'

Cargill sprang up. He said in his very action, in the glance of his eye, that the bairn was now his, and he would not give him up. Curly-Pow took advantage of attention being directed from him, to empty the contents of the jam dish on the tablecloth, to his own rapturous delight.

'She winna get him,' he said, bringing his hand down on the table with a mighty thump which made the crockery ring, while Curly-Pow's eyes grew big and round with wonder.

'Wheesht, wheesht, Dauvit!' said Lisbeth Gray, and she laid her hand on his arm. 'Look at the bairn; does he mind ye o' naebody? The wonder is we've a' been sae blind. That's Maisie Morrison's wean.'

Cargill stared at her stupidly a while, and then, dropping into his chair, let his head fall on his arms, and groaned. This was more than Curly-Pow could stand. He crept to the side of the stricken man and laid his head on his knee with that indescribably winning and pathetic touch which belongs to the child, and to him alone. No other sympathy is so sure, so swift of appeal, as that. Then Mrs. Gray spoke, telling him some, though not all, of the bitter story Maisie Morrison

had unfolded to her; the story of her unhappy marriage, her early widowhood, the struggle to support herself and three little ones, and how, losing two, she became desperate about the third, and so sought to have him cared for by some one who had enough and to spare.

‘Ye maun gie me the bairn, Dauvit, if but for ae nicht,’ she said in conclusion. ‘She’s his mither, an’ I fear me is no’ lang for this warld. I ken it’s a bitter cup, but maybe there’s a sweet drop at the bottom. God’s ways are not ours, efter a’.’

‘I’ll tak’ him ower mysel’,’ said Cargill, rising suddenly, and the clasp of his arms as he lifted Curly-Pow said plainly he would never let him go.

Now though this filled Mrs. Gray with sore amazement—for she thought that the last thing on earth to be desired would be a meeting between Cargill and the woman who had so bitterly betrayed him—she never spoke a word. So they drove through the blinding rain together; Curly-Pow cuddling close in Cargill’s arms, delighted to be out in the dark in such safe keeping, and shortly they came to Stanerigg.

‘D’ye want to see her?’ Lisbeth Gray asked, still perplexed, for this action was both unexpected

and inexplicable. He nodded, and she took them straight up, opened the spare-room door, and keeping her eyes averted, so left them, feeling that the thing was lifted clean beyond her understanding or her aid. But she had neither doubt nor fear, because she knew that it was in the hand of God.

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On a spring day, when the air was soft and balmy, the sky tender as a child's face, and all the earth awaking to the gladness of the opening year, two figures walked in the little wood adjoining the farmhouse of Stanerigg. They had been there a long time, and had spoken much, and on the faces of both peace sat, suggestive of a kind of trembling joy. As they came out upon the lawn, the friend who had made everything possible to them came to meet them from the open door, and though she said nothing, her eyes had a question and a prayer in them. Cargill spoke first:

'Maisie will come to the Barleyknowe at last, Mrs. Gray, for the bairn's sake,' he said, simply. 'We're no' that auld but that we can make a new beginning.'

The woman, to whose pale face the hue of restored health and a measure of the old winsome beauty had returned, held out her hands to the friend who had shown her the better part, who had awakened in her, never to sleep again, the nobler womanhood which might have blessed herself and others long ago.

‘I am not worthy. I—I am afraid,’ she cried, falteringly. ‘Do you think I dare be his wife—his wife, after all that is past?’

She cast upon him such a look of reverent and adoring love that the heart of Lisbeth Gray was fully satisfied.

‘Ye may, I think, if he is pleased, and the bairn,’ she said, with a tremulous smile; then, as she caught sight of him playing in the distance with his arms about the sheep-dog’s neck, she added, more to herself than to them, ‘Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst.’

THE POOR RELATION

THE POOR RELATION

THE brand-new villa of the Laidlaws was the idol of its mistress. Its decoration and care occupied her waking hours and haunted all her dreams. Her pride in it as the outward symbol of their prosperity could not be put into words; though it was visible in her whole manner and bearing, and in her attitude towards those who had not got on so well. In common with many who have risen from obscurity, she had but little quarter for those who lagged behind, or could not pay their way. It is only just to her husband, Tam, to say that but for her he would have been less severe on his shiftless customers, who mortgaged their week's pay before it was earned. Yet Ann Laidlaw had run a barefoot lassie to Faulds school, and carried her father's dinner in a tin pitcher, tied round with a red handkerchief, when he broke stones for his living on the parish road between Faulds and Kilmuir. Nobody living dared remind

Ann Laidlaw of those days; she would have withered them with a glance. In person she was buxom and comely, rosy-cheeked and ample-bosomed—the very embodiment of prosperous complacency. The pity was that her mind was built on so much less generous a scale than her body. Mrs. Laidlaw, after her elevation to The Laurels, made a point of dropping a good many of her former acquaintances; that is, while still recognising them from afar, she did not visit at their houses nor ask them to tea. Going out to tea was a great institution in Faulds, and your intimacy with a person was gauged by the number of times you took tea with her in the year. For a time Mrs. Laidlaw occupied rather an ambiguous social position, after she had repudiated all her old cronies, and before she managed to get any new ones to replace them. She hung, as it were, on the outskirts of society. But by degrees, and by dint of pure effrontery, which goes further than most other qualities in the social world, she managed to worm herself in with the better sort. She was largely tolerated for her husband's sake, because he was a useful man in the parish and a member of the

School Board. Mrs. Laidlaw kept two maids, whom she regarded as her mortal enemies, ready to take advantage of her at every turn, and treated accordingly. This view of the case conduced to frequent changes at The Laurels — every girl eligible for service in Faulds had tried it, and now nobody would engage except girls from a distance.

One morning the prosperous couple were breakfasting together when the post came in. They took all their meals, when alone, in a little parlour about ten feet square, and never sat down in the best rooms except when entertaining company. Consequently their chill desolation was only equalled by their grandeur, which was spoken of in Faulds in undertones as a thing past comprehension. Some discriminating callers at The Laurels wondered how it was possible to gather so much that was hideous and costly together in one place, but the unenlightened worshipped in silence and in wondering awe. Ann Laidlaw was a trifle slipshod of a morning, fond of appearing in a scanty red-flowered dressing-gown, which in some unaccountable way had shrunk up in front and gone down in a long tail behind. It was so old that it

was not worth renovating, in her opinion, so it was buttonless at the neck, and had a slit in one of the back seams, which, however, was hidden by the kindly fulness of a grey woollen shawl, which enveloped the upper part of her body in dingy folds. Gas stoves had but newly come into vogue, and to save her fine grates Mrs. Laidlaw had had one laid on in each room. For some reason or other it did not draw well in the parlour, and made a loud hissing sound without sending out any appreciable heat. Tam shivered as he entered the chill, cheerless room, and cast back a regret to the kitchen behind the shop, where he had been wont to toast his toes and see his bacon lifted frizzling from the pan to the plate. But when we rise in the world we must pay the penalty. Sometimes it is comfort, or peace of mind, or freedom from care, but something we must give in exchange, and well for us if we are permitted to keep our self-respect.

‘That’s a puir fire, Ann, on a January mornin’,’ Tam observed as he took up the *Scotsman* and turned to the markets. ‘It maybe saves wark, but I canna say it’s an improvement.’

‘Sit doon, and your tea’ll warm ye,’ she replied

shortly, being in a ruffled mood because her kitchen girl had given notice, flatly saying she wouldn't stop in a place where they grudged her her meat. Just then the revolting damsel appeared with the letters, which she held between a grimy thumb and forefinger and threw them rather defiantly down on the table.

Mrs. Laidlaw was not interested in letters, which she seldom wrote or received, and her husband took the larger half of his breakfast before he looked at them.

'Hulloa !' he said, as he fingered a poor-looking black-edged envelope. 'Here's a line frae my sister Mary, her that married Andrew Elder, the ship's carpenter at Whiteinch.'

'Ay, and what does she want?' inquired his spouse sourly, convinced that poor relations only wrote when they wanted anything. He did not immediately answer, being interested in the contents of the letter.

'Puir thing,' he said, and his usually hard face was softened into an odd tenderness.

'What's happen't her? Pass it ower,' said Ann.

'She's no weel, an' canna keep on her situation,' said Tam, with his eyes still on the letter.

‘What is’t she does, again?’ inquired Ann, with that lofty, distant kind of interest a queen on the throne might have displayed towards a very obscure subject.

‘She’s an upholstress in the shipyard where Andra used to work. The doctor says she needs a change, an’ must get to the country. We’d better get her here for a week or twa, Ann. She’s the only sister I hae.’

Ann sniffed ominously.

‘It micht be cheaper and mair satisfactory to pay for a week at the seaside for her. I’m no’ very fond o’ relations in the hoose; ye hae never been bothered wi’ ony o’ mine.’

‘That’s got naethin’ to dae wi’t, Ann,’ Tam replied with a great deal of firmness. ‘If ye had wantit them, well dae I ken that they’d a’ been here, in spite o’ my neck. I’ll write the day and tell her to come aff as sune as she likes. Puir thing, she’s a weedy without bairns, a gey desolate object.’

Ann made no reply, but felt that her troubles were being multiplied. Tam and she lived peaceably together on the whole, chiefly because he gave her her own way in most things, being afraid of her shrewish tongue. But there were some

things he could be firm about, and certain moods of his she could not conquer. She saw that he had made up his mind about his sister Mary, and that it would be needless for her to say anything. In the course of the day, however, a nice little idea occurred to her, that during Mrs. Elder's stay she might be able to dispense with a kitchen servant. She had often heard Tam praise his sister's cooking ; she had been a cook in a gentleman's family before her marriage to the ship's carpenter. Cooking was an art of which Ann herself was as ignorant as a baby ; in fact she could hardly boil a potato without spoiling it, though she was particularly good at finding fault with other people's mistakes.

Ann had once visited at the ship-carpenter's in her own less prosperous days, and she remembered Mary as a genteel, gimpy-looking person, very neat and precise in all her ways. But her appearance when Tam brought her up from the station about eight o'clock on the Friday night was a considerable surprise to her. Her widow's weeds were shabby, but they were worn with a singular and quiet grace ; her face was very pale and worn, and she looked old, though not yet

forty, but it was a very sweet face, with a look of quiet strength and endurance on it, which somehow sank into the heart of Ann Laidlaw, and made her feel rather small and mean, and ashamed of herself. She had put on an old but elaborately trimmed silk gown, a big lace collar, and a long gold chain round her neck, as well as a good many rings on her fingers—all to impress the poor relation with the changed condition of affairs in her brother's house. But the poor relation did not appear to see it. She was evidently very tired, and seemed grateful for the cup of tea which waited for her, though Ann verily believed she never noticed the best china, nor the second best teapot, not to speak of the spoons, which were real silver of the rat-tail pattern, with a monogram on the handle. That however, was a mistake. Mary Elder saw everything that it was desired she should see, and some things not intended, though she made no sign.

‘If ye dinna mind, Ann, I’ll go to my bed,’ she said. ‘I hope I’ll be better the morn. The doctor said a rest was what I needit. It’s very kind o’ you to hae me, an’ I’ll gie as little trouble as I can.’

‘That’s naething ; I winna coont it a trouble,’ said Ann, quite frankly for her, and wished with all her heart she had made ready the spare room instead of a cheerless little chamber next the one occupied by the maids. But Mary seemed grateful in a quiet, undemonstrative way for the slightest attention, and refused to be on the outlook, as many poor relations are, for slights over which to brood and make themselves miserable. She took it for granted that Ann was glad to see her and wished to be kind to her, and so surprised her into doing the very things she had set herself not to do. Next day she was not able to come downstairs at all, and Ann carried her meals to her with her own hands ungrudgingly, and sat with her in the afternoon while she did some fearful and wonderful woollen crewel-work on a strip of velveteen, intended, as she proudly explained, to make a mantelpiece border for the dining-room. It was a newly acquired accomplishment, which made Ann feel quite a real lady when engaged upon it.

She wondered that she found such pleasure in the companionship of the sister-in-law she had, no later than yesterday, so heartily despised. Mary

was not a great talker, but as they sat together that afternoon her lips dropped sweetness which sank into the heart of Ann Laidlaw, good seed waiting for the harvest. In that quiet hour Ann learned a good deal about Mary Elder that she had not known before. She gathered from her speech, though there was no boastfulness in the telling, that her life in the busy, overcrowded working district where her lot was cast was entirely spent for others, helping to nurse the sick and cheer the sad, giving of her slender substance, which she so hardly earned, to others who were more needful ; and her heart seemed to be filled to the brim with loving-kindness and mercy and sympathy towards all that lived. She was a plain woman, uneducated and unrefined according to the common standard, but her nature bore the stamp of the true gentlehood which is the spirit of the Lord Jesus. Strange that so rare and sweet a character should have come from a bitter source, and be so unlike the others of her name and race. Thus it is sometimes possible to gather a grape from a thorn, though we are expressly told that it cannot be.

When Ann Laidlaw went down at tea-time, she

gave orders that the spare bedroom fire should be lighted and made ready for the guest for whom she had at first prepared such a sorry, half-hearted welcome. And she did not put away any of the ornaments or turn the bright red and blue hearth-rug before the fire, as she had been known to do for guests she did not consider worthy to behold the full glory of the best bedroom, which, in a moment of high housewifely exultation, and after the perusal of a *Family Herald Supplement*, she had christened the Blue Room. In a few days the fresh country air and the healthy surroundings began to work the desired change in the poor relation, and her appearance to show visible signs of improvement. She was very happy with her brother and his wife, and Tam found his home such a pleasant place, he spent less time in the dingy back shop poring over the books, which required no small skill to keep them up to date. As for Ann, she was more amiable than anybody had ever known her, and Betsy Dewar, the kitchen servant, of her own free will took back her warning, and offered to stay the winter.

This little time of pleasant rest and security was the precursor of stormy times in the Laidlaw

household. Ann came back from paying a two days' visit in Edinburgh one night feeling very unwell, and next day was unable to get up. There was a new doctor in Doctor Gourlay's place, a clever young fellow, winning a great reputation for himself. When he came he looked very grave, and fetched the other doctor, with whom he amicably co-operated, as his predecessor had done. But they said they would reserve their opinion till the next day. When they came again there was no doubt at all about the fell disease. Ann Laidlaw was stricken with small-pox of the most virulent and dangerous type.

Tam was at the shop when they paid their visit, and it was to Mrs. Elder, of course, they made their report.

'We would advise you,' said the elder doctor, 'to send her to the hospital. We can get an ambulance out from Edinburgh; of course it is a risk in her present state, but I don't see what else we can do.'

'Do!' repeated Mrs. Elder. 'What's to hinder me nursing her here? I've had a lot o' experience among no-weel folk, an' I can dae what I'm telt, which I've heard doctors say afore noo is the chief thing in a nurse.'

The two men exchanged smiles.

‘There is no doubt about your capability if you are not afraid for yourself.’

Mary Elder gave her shoulders a little shrug.

‘What for should I be feared? We can dee but aince. I’ll set the lassies hame, an’ my brother must just live at the shop meanwhile, an’ get his report frae you.’

So it was arranged. Within half an hour of their acquaintance with the alarming nature of their mistress’s illness, the two servants were out of the house, with the fear of death written on their faces. Mary had half hoped that Betsy Dewar, who was a kind of diamond in the rough, might have found it in her heart to stay; but she felt relieved of all responsibility when they both fled, and prepared for her long vigil and complete isolation from the world. It was longer than any had anticipated. For many weeks no foot crossed the threshold of The Laurels except that of the doctor and Angus Fleming, who was now the beloved and respected minister of the Free Church. Ann Laidlaw had a prolonged and sharp struggle for her life, but, thanks to the skill of the attending physicians and the unselfish

ministrations of her nurse, she turned the corner at last and began to recover. She was frightfully weak, of course—too weak at first to do anything but lie prone in her bed and watch Mary Elder at her needlework or flitting about her duties. She did not even seem to remember, if she had ever understood, the nature of her illness, and it struck her one day that the house was terribly quiet, and that she had seen no face but Mary's for a long time.

‘That was Tam at the door. I’ll let him look in at the windy the morn,’ said Mary one day, after she had been absent from the room for a few minutes. ‘Puir chield, it has been an unco time for him bidin’ his lane.’

‘Where is he?’ inquired Ann; for though it had been explained to her at the beginning of her illness what precautions were imperative, she seemed to have quite forgotten.

‘He’s bidin’ at the shop, makin’ his ain meat an’ dreein’ his weird as best he can, but it’ll sune be ower noo.’

‘An’ where’s the lassies, Mary?’ was Ann’s next puzzled question.

‘Awa’ hame langsyne, but they’ll baith come back again, as sune as they get leave.’

Ann turned uneasily, and tried to raise herself on her elbow.

‘What has ailed me? Is’t a fever I’ve had, Mary?’

‘No, my dear. I thocht ye kent; it’s waur nor a fever, an’ it’s a miracle to see ye as ye are. Ye’re getting better o’ the sma’-pox.’

The invalid fell back among her pillows, and a look of vague terror gathered on her face.

‘Bring me a gless,’ she said at length; and Mary smiled to herself, not surprised, and thanking God that there was no need to try to set aside her request. She took the little hand-glass from the toilet table, and held it before her sister-in-law’s face.

‘Ye’re no quite so sonsy as ye was, Ann, but there’s nae marks. He’s a clever young doctor that; and he deserves a muckle fee, which Tam will no’ grudge him.’

Ann Laidlaw scanned her sharp features and sunken eyes with a painful eagerness.

‘I’m an awfu’-like besom, Mary, if ye ask me,’ she said, and then they both laughed, rather tremulously.

‘An’ ye’ve been bidin’ here yoursel’ nursin’ me

and daein' a'thing withoot a thocht o' yersel', said Ann after a while, as things became clearer to her. 'Eh, mercy me! God reward you an' forgi'e me.'

'Dinna mak' ower muckle o' a sma' thing, Ann; as I said to Dr. Ramsay, we can dee but aince,' said Mary, with a quiet light in her eyes. 'An' I thank the Lord that He has lang liftit me abune that fear.' 

Ann Laidlaw never spoke, but turned her face to the wall and wept like a child. Her convalescence was steady and sure, and at the end of another month she and Tam went to the west coast for a change, and during their absence Mary took upon herself the cleaning and disinfecting of the house. When they came back to it again on a sunny spring afternoon, it was looking as bonnie and fresh as the first day Ann had got it in order. All the crocuses and hyacinths were in bloom to welcome her, and at the door stood Mary and the two maids smiling, in new caps and aprons; and it was all so sweet and homelike and undeserved that poor Ann Laidlaw could do nothing but cry and say she was unworthy of it all. Then there was a period of unspeakable

peace and quiet happiness in that changed house, and many who had never cared to linger under its roof now came, because they found the atmosphere pleasant and very different from what it was. It became a common remark in Faulds what a change for the better had been wrought in Ann Laidlaw by her illness, which had therefore proved a blessed dispensation to her. But curiously, nobody placed the credit where it was due, nor could they see that it was the poor relation, who still remained at The Laurels, who had shed the lovely grace of her own quiet, unselfish, and consecrated life over her brother's household. One man began to see it after a time, and to find some attraction in the Laidlaws' house, and that was Mr. Cairncross, the manager of the Ladyford mines. He had a good deal of business, one way and another, with Tam Laidlaw, but it had always hitherto been satisfactorily settled at the shop. Nobody paid much heed, however, when he began to drop in of an evening to smoke a friendly pipe with Tam; and certainly it never dawned upon one or other that Mary could have anything to do with it. In the middle of these pleasant spring days happened that terrible

calamity, the breaking of the United Bank. A great many folk in Faulds were involved, Laidlaw and Mr. Cairncross among the most seriously. It was a terrible blow to Tam, and he was amazed that his wife took it so philosophically. He had feared, indeed, to tell her that all their savings, amounting to a good many thousand pounds, were swallowed up.

But she, to whom money and the things money can buy had been the very wine of life, just turned to him with a smile, a trifle tremulous, on her still white, thin face.

‘There’s waur calamities than that, Tam, an’ we’ve ane anither left,’ was all she said.

‘But, Ann, ye dinna understand,’ he said, desperately. ‘It means ruin. We’ll hae to leave the hoose, an’ if we can keep on the business it’ll be by leave o’ oor creditors.’

‘What about the hoose! we were happy abune the shop or we ever saw it, my man, an’ I’ll gang ahint the coonter as I did afore, and be blithe to do it, so dinna you vex yoursel’; we’ll get as muckle as serve oor turn yet.’

Tam stared at her helplessly.

‘What has come ower ye, Ann? Ye’re no’ like

the same wummin. I whiles fear your only spared a wee ; ye jist seem ower guid.'

'It's Mary, Tam—Mary an' the Lord atween them,' she said, without an irreverent thought. 'Eh, man, I've a lot to mak' up to you an' her, an' a'budy ; an' I hope I may be spared langer than a wee.'

Tam felt much inclined to take her in his arms, but restrained himself, because such a thing had not happened for twenty years or more, and he was not sure how Ann might take it. But though he went back to the shop with a lump in his throat and a moisture in his eyes, there was a strange, deep, sweet peace in his heart. For so long as the wife a man loves sticks up for him and stands by him through all the ills of life, what calamity can touch him ? That night Mr. Cairncross came to the The Laurels ; and, as it happened, Mary Elder was in the house alone, her brother and his wife having gone over to the manse to see Angus Fleming and his mother.

She greeted him in her own pleasant, undisturbed fashion, betraying no embarrassment, and bidding him sit down and wait till they should return. This he did, nothing loth, and his fine

face wore a more than ordinarily satisfied look.

'This is a terrible business, the breaking of the bank,' he said suddenly. 'Is Mr. Laidlaw deeply involved?'

'Yes, he has lost a'thing,' she said, with a momentary sadness. 'An' the queer thing is, they dinna seem to care.'

'I've lost a good deal myself,' he said gravely, 'close on ten thousand pounds, but I shall not suffer as many will, as I have an assured income more than sufficient for my needs.'

'Then be thankfu',' she said quietly, and with no intention to rebuke. 'I'm vexed for my sister-in-law, for she'll have to leave this hoose that she's ta'en so muckle pride in; an' I think it's jist wonderfu' the way she taks it. A body wad think she was fain to get back to the shop. They had kindly asked me to bide wi' them aye, and blithe was I to do it, but noo I'll hae to gang back to Whiteinch, an' gratefu' am I that my job's still open to me, an' that I hae somebody there to gie me a hand-shake forbye.'

Mr. Cairncross got up and walked across the floor. He was a very tall man of striking and

handsome presence, and just then he gave Mary a sense of filling all the room. Her sweet eyes followed him with a mild wonder in their depths.

‘Mrs. Elder, I’m a lone man up at the Mount, and my fortunes are sadly changed. Such as they are, will you share them? I had a sweetheart in my youth, but she died, and I have never cared to look at another woman since, until I met you. Now everything seems changed. Do you think you could be my wife?’

It was a very abrupt and plain wooing, but it made a great stir in Mary Elder’s quiet heart, and the colour, pink and sweet as a girl’s, flushed all her face. She looked up at him tremblingly, with eyes that seemed to read his soul. There was no shrinking in his face. He stood before her with that serene calm which the consciousness of an upright, God-fearing life alone can give; anxious, of course, because the matter was of great moment to him; anxious, yet not afraid. His life was a clean record, which the eyes of any pure woman could read and rejoice over. She thought of his character and work in the place, of all she had heard to his honour and credit, and a great peace came to her.

'Yes,' she said at last, very low, but he caught the words. 'Yes, I think I could. I'm a plain woman, as ye ken, but if you want me I'll come.'

So Mary became mistress of the Mount, to the sore amazement of Faulds, in which it made a nine days' wonder. And some professed themselves at a loss to know what the popular manager, who might have had his pick of the countryside, had seen in that plain little woman, the widow of a ship's carpenter at Whiteinch, and with no pretensions which could fit her for such a position in the place. But George Cairncross knew very well what he was doing, and that in uniting that sweet life to his he ensured his own happiness, and made for himself a home which a king might have envied him. Truly they are to this day happier than most, and Mary Cairncross is to the mining population of Faulds what Lisbeth Gray was for many years to the ploughmen and farmers in the Dale. And as I think on these things, which are known to me, and listen to the clamour we hear of the New Woman and her rights and privileges, I wonder much that women are so blind.

For the Old Women, of whom Lisbeth Gray and Mary Cairncross are the types, exercise rights

which are divine, and have secured to them privileges which the angels about the throne might envy. And I pray that when this empty clamour shall have died down, our women will return to the simpler life, and be, as aforetime, ministering spirits to the many who need their sweet ministry, faithful servants whom, when the Lord cometh, He shall find watching.

A CHRISTMAS FEAST

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IN my day Christmas was not much honoured by sentiment or observance in Faulds. New Year was the festival among the miners, and Hogmanay the signal for a more than usually liberal and disastrous consumption of shortbread, washed down by unlimited whisky. Handsel Monday was more affected by the ploughmen, and a by-word greeting, current with them throughout the year, was, 'Whaur are ye gaun next Handsel Monday?'

Christmas not being much in vogue in Faulds, then, there were few pretty fancies or little bits of romance connected with it, but the one I am about to relate I can vouch for the truth of, because I was myself a witness to it, though through no deservng of my own. But to this day I am grateful that I was so privileged to step aside into the byways of human experience, and to witness that wholesome touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

The day before Christmas, just three months after her marriage, Mrs. Cairncross came up the brae to the village, and after leaving an order at her brother's shop for some things she wanted for her Christmas dinner, she ran in for a word with Ann, to bid her come over to the Mount the next afternoon to give her a hand with the table. She did not stay long, being in a hurry and full of happy business, which, as usual, concerned others much more than herself.

'George says I am to bid Mr. Fairweather, Ann, and to take nae denial,' she said, as she stood a moment at the door. 'D'ye think he'll come?'

'Faith, I dinna ken; but ye can see. Are ye gaun there the noo?'

Mrs. Cairncross nodded and ran off with a hurried good-bye. With her marriage she appeared to have renewed her youth, and was a perpetual source of wonder and admiration to Ann, and to many others. It was Mr. Cairncross's pleasure that his wife should be handsomely dressed, and that day she wore a sealskin jacket which Ann knew was never bought under forty pounds. Now a sealskin jacket is a garment such

as can be worn with full grace and becomingness only by a slender woman, but which adds breadth and squatness to the generously inclined. Mary wore her jacket with grace because she could not help it, and with pride because it was given to her by her dear husband, for whom she gave thanks to God every day of her happy life.

She crossed the steep, wide street in a slanting direction, and entered a little shop, in the window of which was displayed a motley arrangement of sweetstuff, oranges and apples, and penny cakes. This was the emporium of Bawbie Mitchell, dear to the soul of every laddie that ever drew the breath of life in Faulds. If it be that this should meet the eye of any Faulds laddie now exiled, he will not need me to remind him of Bawbie's two specialities made by her own hands—her large, luscious and lasting 'bools,' the most effectual gag for a wagging tongue I ever saw, and her treacle gundy, in sticks rolled round with white paper, twisted cunningly at each end. How many a time have I and my compeers flattened our noses against Bawbie's window, and dwelt upon the possibilities life might hold for such as could afford unlimited purchases of those toothsome

morsels! The queer thing is, how mortals change in taste, as in everything else. The first time I came down from London after I was out of my apprenticeship, I expended sixpence recklessly at Bawbie's counter, and found one bool very satisfying. The gundy I most unblushingly gave away. But I must not digress, lest your digestion sour ere the Christmas dinner is served. There was only one possession of Bawbie Mitchell's more interesting to Faulds bairns than the afore-said specialities, and that was her one-eyed starling, that hung up in a big wicker cage at the door of the little back-room. Nobody knew the history nor the age of Peter Mitchell, as he was called, though why 'Peter' remains a mystery to this day. He was no beauty, and very ill-tempered, and he said so little that nobody could brag of his linguistic accomplishments, but he served in the shop instead of a bell, never failing at the entrance of every customer to give vent to the most unearthly 'skraigh,' as Bawbie called it, which she could hear in the remotest corner of the house, and down to the foot of the garden as well. That he was a discerning bird and knew his function, was evidenced by the fact

that he never 'skraighed' if Bawbie were behind the counter. She was weighing out pennyworths of sweeties into little paper bags against the rush of trade she expected the following week, when Mrs. Cairncross came into the shop. Bawbie was a spinster of uncertain age, a thin, wiry little person, well preserved, with a face ruddy like a winter apple, dancing black eyes, and a row of little corkscrew curls kept in place by side-combs. I remember no change in her these twenty years.

'Good-day, Bawbie,' observed Mrs. Cairncross pleasantly. 'I hope I see ye weel. Is Mr. Fairweather in?'

'Yes, he's at his tea. D'ye want to see him?'

'If it winna bother him, I would like a word wi' him.'

'Oh, it'll no bother him, I'll warrant!' replied Bawbie, with conviction. 'Come up the stair.'

Mr. Fairweather occupied a bed-sitting-room directly above the shop—a very comfortable place and cheery, looking out on the street. He was sitting at the fire with his frugal meal on a little round table, and he rose up from his elbow chair when he heard the steps on the stair.

'Mrs. Cairncross for a word wi' ye, sir,' said

Bawbie, putting her head within the door, and immediately disappeared.

The old man came forward with a pleased look on his face, and received his visitor with a courtly grace peculiarly his own. He was very tall, and his shoulders were sadly bent. The long dressing-gown he wore seemed to reveal rather than to hide the spare slenderness of his figure, and Mrs. Cairncross thought the face under the black skull-cap very wan and thin. It was a beautiful face, sealed with the peace of an upright life, and with a certain spirituality which seemed to speak of a soul in touch with the unseen. Twenty years before he had been proud of his resemblance to Mr. Gladstone, but in later life that resemblance had become less marked. The old schoolmaster had retired from the arena, and was less keen on politics than of yore, and was wont to deplore the decay of high honour and probity in public life. He had been Free Church schoolmaster in Faulds from the Disruption, and had turned out some fine scholars and many good citizens, his teaching taking a wider scope than any code. The lessons taught by Adam Fairweather are to my certain knowledge bearing fruit to this day in the four

corners of the earth. With the advent of the School Board, Adam found his occupation gone ; and, too old to seek pastures new, and having enough for his slender wants, he lived the evening of his days in quiet among his books. He had been a widower for twenty years, and had one son, who, while not exactly a ne'er-do-well, had been shiftless and idle in his youth, and had finally emigrated to New Zealand. His father had heard nothing of him for five years, and now in his extreme old age, and having lost his little savings in the disastrous United Bank failure, was a somewhat sad and wholly pathetic figure ; yet with a certain dignity which forbade pity even delicately conveyed.

‘Good-day to ye, Mr. Fairweather,’ said Mrs Cairncross cheerily. ‘I’m sent by Mr. Cairncross to bid ye come and eat your Christmas dinner wi’ us the morn, an’ I’m to tak’ nae excuse. That’s my orders.’

‘Sit down, ma’am, sit down,’ said the old man, with a pleased smile. ‘It is most kind of Mr. Cairncross, and you to bring the message, and to remember me at all. But I fear I am but poor company for any Christmas feast.’

‘Puir company, indeed! We’ll not argue that, Mr. Fairweather, but expect you at six o’clock sharp,’ said Mrs. Cairncross briskly. ‘Now I’ll tell ye wha’s comin’—my brither and his wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Gray from Stanerigg, and David Lyall, yin o’ yer ain laddies. Mr. Cairncross met him yesterday. He’s bidin’ wi’ his aunt, Miss Wallace, at the Byres, an’ they’re baith comin’, an’ the minister; that’s a’.’

‘A goodly company, indeed. I should rather like to see David again. He was a likely lad, and I hope he is doing well in London.’

‘Ye can come an’ see,’ said Mrs. Cairncross, with a nod. ‘Now I’m awa’, for I’m a busy woman this day. So guid-bye, an’ six o’clock sharp, and we’ll drive ye hame, or keep ye a’ nicht if you’ll bide.’

So saying, and without waiting to hear another word, the little woman hurried away.

‘Bawbie,’ she said solemnly as she re-entered the shop, ‘he’s sair failed.’

Bawbie nodded, and her curls jerked, but her kind face was very grave. ‘The loss o’ the siller’s telt on him. It’s left him very jimp. Eh, thae bank directors, they should be hung up by the

neck! Gie me the stockin'-fit for siller yet. It maybe disna grow there, but you can grip it when ye like.'

Mrs. Cairncross agreed, and as she walked soberly home, pondered the case of the schoolmaster in her mind. She had heard her husband and Mr. Haldane of Easterlaw talking of him one night, and mooting some plan whereby his loss could be made good to him without wounding him, and she determined to help that good project forward without delay.

Next afternoon, about five o'clock, Adam Fairweather turned out ready for this most unusual dissipation, and as he walked down the village street, many regarded him with admiration, and more than one observed, 'Isn't the maister braw?'

He wore a long surtout coat, fashioned after the pattern of a bygone day, with a well-brushed velvet collar, which only looked shabby in the sun, a pair of shepherd-tartan trousers, carefully polished boots and white spats, a flowered waistcoat, and a high-peaked collar, kept in place by a neatly folded black-silk stock. A gentleman every inch of him, and one of the simplest, most lovable souls that ever lived. It was not a long

walk to the Mount, which must have been christened out of pure contradiction, since it lay distinctly and snugly in a hollow. Faulds itself straggled on the two slopes of a valley, through which ran the bonnie Faulds burn, a clear and gurgling stream not despised by anglers, especially on its lower reaches, where it broadens to join the river whose name it is not presently expedient that I reveal. The road divided the Pitbraden property from Inneshall, and the Mount had been a former dower-house of the Inneses. It therefore stood within the grounds, and was a very roomy, old-fashioned, picturesque abode, a perfect show-place for beauty in the summer.

It was a great uplifting, of course, for the ship-carpenter's widow to become mistress of the fine old house, but she accepted it all so naturally, and was so sweetly at home in it, that nobody could have guessed that she was not to the manner born. I have been at many dinners in my time, but I never sat at a more homely and delightful table, among so many pleasant guests, as on that memorable Christmas Day. There was no elaborate menu; the appetites of Faulds folk being wholesome, required no false tickling. So the



fare was of the good old-fashioned sort, and it graced the massive, well-arranged table, and was in keeping with the whole spirit and circumstance of the feast. There was neither a low-cut bodice nor a swallow-tailed coat in the company, so that the old schoolmaster's surtout was in no manner out of place. He was in great form. In that happy and congenial company the shadows seemed to roll back from his somewhat saddened heart, and he gave us of his best. And what a best it was! What a fund of quaint drollery was hidden under his grave looks, how sharp and swift his tongue to point the neat phrase and turn the shaft of delicate wit! Old stories fell from his lips clothed in a new and living garb we scarcely recognised, and how his gentle, merry laugh rang again when we saw ourselves thus so shamelessly taken in. Our host and hostess were teetotallers both, but they had provided champagne of rare and delicate bouquet for their guests, and the old man was prevailed upon to drink a generous glass which sent the blood coursing through his veins with something of the vigour of long ago. Then we asked him for a song, knowing well that if he could be persuaded a treat would be ours. He

had a tenor voice, of very pure and sweet quality, with which he had led the praise in the Free for five-and-thirty years. Now the precentor's box is occupied by an able-bodied miner, whose idea of his calling is to bawl at the very pitch of his voice, and he has gathered about him what he calls a choir of raw lads and lassies, like-minded with himself. Many of us are 'wae' over the change.

A Scotch song we naturally expected, because we knew his repertoire was full, and we were not disappointed. I think I see him yet, standing with his long, delicate, characteristic hand lying firmly on the white table-cloth, his figure drawn up proudly, his rapt face responsive, as was his voice, to the sentiment and the melody of the exquisite ballad he chose :

‘ Kind, kind and gentle is she,
Kind is my Mary ;
The tender blossom on the tree
Can not compare wi' Mary.’

We saw that the heart of the old man was stirred as he sang, and that his thoughts were with the long ago, when his Mary had walked so happily by his side. As he came to the last verse

the big tears rolled down his cheeks, and I am not ashamed to say that I could not have spoken for the lump in my throat. Just then there came a great loud knocking at the door, and the maid came to say that a lady and gentleman would speak with Mrs. Cairncross. When she left the room, the old man rose to his feet again, and said he'd give us the last verse over again for auld langsyne.

‘ But see ye one o’ modest air,
Bedecked wi’ beauty saft an’ rare,
That mak’s your heart feel sweetly sair,
O weel ye ken, my Mary.
Sae kind, kind and gentle is she,
Kind is my Mary ;
The tender blossom on the tree
Can not compare wi’ Mary.’

He was in the middle of the refrain, and had his hand uplifted, beating time to the plaintive tune, when we saw the dining-room door softly open. And three came in where one only had gone out. Now I had been at Faulds School with Jock Fairweather, the schoolmaster’s son, and had played truant with him too, many an afternoon in the nesting-time in the woods of Inneshall; but though he now stood before us in the flesh, I had

no more recognition of him than if he had been an utter stranger. He was now a man of five-and-thirty, well-grown and handsome, and with a grave, trust-inspiring face, on which was visible just then nothing but a great sadness. A lady was with him, younger than he, and very sweet and fair to look upon, the wife he had won across the sea. Adam Fairweather paused at the third line of the refrain, and turned his eyes to the door. Immediately he recognised his truant son, and sank into his chair trembling as if he had gotten a mortal blow.

‘Is that him, John?’ asked the young wife, wonderingly, and I have long remembered the tender sweetness of her voice. ‘Oh, what a dear old man!’

Then she took a swift step forward, and kneeling by his chair, put her arm round his neck, and laid her soft, pink cheek to his. And in a moment Jock was at the other side, and we rose with one accord. As we passed out of the room, which tender human feeling had thus made holy ground, I saw the face of Robert Gray of Stanerigg work convulsively, and his great, powerful frame tremble like a little child’s. And though

his wife's heart was breaking with its bitter cry for her own boy who 'was not,' she, woman-like and God-like — I write it reverently — had her hand through her husband's arm in a moment, and at her touch his trembling ceased.

So we all went out one by one, and the door was closed.

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Jock Fairweather's return was a great excitement in Faulds, which was increased when it got about that he had come back a rich man, and could be a member of Parliament any day in New Zealand. Thus I fear that we cannot lay claim to any special high-mindedness in Faulds, but are as susceptible as the rest of the world to filthy lucre and its charms.

He and his wife abode a month at the Mount, the guests of the Cairncrosses, and then they went back to New Zealand, taking the old man with them. Mrs. Cairncross told me that he went with them as pleased and happy as a child, and that it was a sight to see the three together. And for twelve months Faulds was without its Adam Fairweather. Then there came a letter to Mrs. Cairncross, which did not surprise her very much,

for she had never expected that the old man would lay his bones across the sea. It contained very full instructions, which she carried out to the letter, with all the joy it gave that good soul to do kind deeds for others. And when April came with balmy airs and that heavenly sunshine which wooed into bloom all the primroses in the Innes-hall woods, and decked the banks of the Faulds burn with the white anemone stars, there was a snug little cottage on the Pitbraden side of the burn all ready for a new tenant. It happened that I was at the Byres for my Easter holiday, and Mrs. Cairncross was kind enough to let me see through it. I never saw a sweeter, more homelike little place, and the sitting-room, which had a quaint latticed window, looking out cheerily on the road, had in it some of Adam Fairweather's old bits of furniture, from which he had parted reluctantly, not knowing that they were only stored in one of Mrs. Cairncross's lumber-rooms. More important still, perhaps, Bawbie Mitchell, who was less able than of yore to cater for the taste of Faulds youth, had taken possession, being duly installed as housekeeper. Nor was Peter Mitchell left behind. On the sunny May after-

noon when Jock Fairweather brought his father back to the cosy little biggin' prepared for him, but of which he was till that day in ignorance, Peter was hanging in his wicker cage at the door, and Bawbie standing within the porch all smiles, though her spectacles were dim with tears.

'What 's this, John?' asked the old man tremblingly, as his son set wide the freshly painted garden gate. 'Where are you taking me to?'

'Your own home, father, since your heart has been here so long, and I pray God you may have health and comfort in it for many a day.'

Then Peter Mitchell, who had been singularly morose and languid all day, preened his rusty feathers and gave vent to the familiar 'skraigh,' followed by an extraordinary burst of speech.

'Hulloa, Maister Fairweather! Graund weather for the craps. Keep up your dander.' Then in sepulchral tones, and with a peculiarly knowing gleam in his seeing eye, 'A bawbee's worth o' bools, an' a bawbee back.'

Having thus emptied himself of his whole repertoire in one fell burst, Peter relapsed into his customary state of dignified silence, and spoke no more till the day of his death.

So the old man, content and satisfied now that he had seen the new world and his son's home, settled down, happy as a king, among his bees and his flowers, and is the picture of beatified content to this day. Among the treasures he proudly shows to his many friends are the photographs of his two chubby grandchildren, who have been early taught to love and lisp his name. And on the New Zealand mail-day, he may be seen punctually at the quarter to four o'clock in the afternoon crossing the bridge on his way to the post-office, to await the sorting out of the letters. And though Sandy Melville thinks nothing of keeping the Laird himself waiting while he reads all the postcards and draws his own conclusions regarding handwriting and postmarks, he is always ready for the schoolmaster, both with his letter and a cheery word.

‘There ye are, Maister Fairweather! Guid news to ye, an’ plenty o’t.’

The old man has lived forty-two years in one place, without making an enemy or rousing the birse of the most cantankerous. Yet some of us can hardly live a week without casting out with somebody.

God grant, then, that Adam Fairweather be long spared ; for on the day that we carry him down the brae to the kirkyard a sweet savour will be lost to Faulds, which could never be restored.

But for him, when that day shall come, it will be but a joyful step higher, into the larger room.

MY AUNT ROBINA

MY AUNT ROBINA

IN my boyhood I stood considerably in awe of my Aunt Robina, otherwise Miss Wallace of The Byres. My father was cashier at the Ladyford Pits, and we lived in a roomy but very dreary house right in the middle of the Rows. Our outlook was upon refuse heaps and cinder hills, and my mother deplored to the last day of her life the terrible difficulties of housekeeping in such surroundings. In these circumstances it was a great treat to me to get away up to The Byres for a few days, or even for a Saturday afternoon, especially as my grandfather and I were great chums. Old Byres, as he was familiarly called, was one of the most genial and good-hearted of men, and at a certain stage in my career, viz. the truant-playing stage, I loved him a good deal better than my own father, whose ideas of justice and discipline I considered extreme. Many a time has my dear old grandad stood between me

and punishment righteously earned and richly deserved, even to surreptitiously hiding me in the chaff-hole at The Byres. He was as fond of me as I was of him. I was the only youngster in the connection, my mother being his younger daughter. Aunt Robina was his only other child.

My mother was a little woman, with a sweet face, which never lost its young girlish look; but Aunt Robina was very tall and handsome, and her manner befitted her stature, being dignified and reserved in the extreme. I used to compare her very unfavourably with my mother, but now, I know that her character was of a finer and loftier order, capable of reaching heights of heroism and self-sacrifice which would have appalled my mother's gentler mould. This I say without disparagement to her whose memory is still one of my sweetest possessions. Alas that it should be but a memory to-day! My mother was always delicate. Aunt Robina often boasted that she had never had a day's illness in her life. But though the sisters were so little alike, they were devotedly attached to each other, and I know now that the tragedy of Aunt Robina's life hastened my mother's end.

The offices at the Ladyford mine were large and commodious, and there was work sufficient for a dozen clerks. Among so many there was a good deal of change and variety, and when I was old enough to begin my career on a stool there, I soon learned that it is possible to run the whole gamut of human nature within the four walls of a counting-house. We were generally on pretty good terms with the office fellows—that is, my father encouraged them to come about the house, and my mother did what she could to make them feel that in her they had a friend. Aunt Robina came a good deal too, of course, and no doubt she was an attraction—two or three of them were always in love with her at one time. But she was very stand-offish and particular, and when I see how cheap some girls make themselves in their anxiety to call themselves engaged, I feel tempted to tell them they are on the wrong tack entirely. Yet the odd and sad thing is that, after all, Aunt Robina made shipwreck of her life, and will go down to the grave with a scar on her heart which will never be removed.

Just about the time I left Adam Fairweather's school, and was elevated to a stool in my father's

office, we got a new clerk called Dick Rattray—a dashing, handsome fellow, who gave one the impression of wishing to carry everything before him. My father did not take to him, but as he was an excellent servant, and no fault could be found with his work or conduct inside, he tried to overcome his prejudice; but he never succeeded, and he seemed much annoyed when it became apparent that he was paying very special attention to Aunt Robina, especially as it was also quite evident that she seemed inclined to favour him. You would have gone far and wide to find a handsomer pair than Dick Rattray and Aunt Robina; and even my mother smiled indulgently, and wondered why father was so hard to please. But that he possessed a discriminating judgment of human nature was abundantly proved by subsequent events. To make this part of my story short, Dick and my aunt became engaged, with the reluctant consent of my grandfather, though her marriage would leave him very lonely at The Byres. Soon after the engagement was settled, Dick took a restless fit and began to talk of emigrating to a certain portion of South Africa, about which there happened to be at the time a

gold craze. And off he went, on the understanding that within a year Aunt Robina was to go out to him. My father was furious over this arrangement, and could never speak of it with patience, although he was ordinarily a most moderate and just-minded man. At the end of the year, as arranged, Aunt Robina went away. It is an odd thing how women, the most self-contained and reserved in other relations of their life, so often give themselves away, if I may use the expression, in that relation which is the very making or marring of their destiny. My aunt was absolutely infatuated with Rattray, and as my father said, rather bitterly for him, who was usually so gentle of speech :

‘ Well, she’s off from us all without a pang, at the first wag of Dick Rattray’s little finger. If he betrays that trust, may I be spared to get even with him.’

For my father loved Robina Wallace as if she had been his own sister, and I know that, had he lived, the tragedy of her life would have eaten into his big, warm, generous heart. At first she wrote gaily—full of delight and contentment over Dick’s goodness and devotion, and giving us glowing

accounts of her new life. These epistles, which were eagerly devoured at The Byres and in our house, came with great regularity at first ; but gradually the intervals increased between them, until it was no uncommon thing for months to pass without a letter. Also I have heard them say that their tone changed, and that the jubilant note had ceased to sound through them, though she seemed to take great care not to make a complaint. But we saw that the heart of the old man in the lonely farmhouse among the hills was big with unspoken dread, and he got a pathetic, wistful look in his eyes and about his kind old mouth which indicated an anxiety that never slept. Troubles thickened upon us about that time, and I look back to it as one of the dark periods of my life. My father lost his life, a victim to his own heroism and bravery, in the great explosion which made Faulds a world's wonder at the time. He was the leader of the forlorn hope that went down into the blackness of the bowels of the earth to seek and, if possible, bring relief to the entombed miners. But not one came back to tell the tale. Left alone, it was but natural that my mother and I should make our home with the old man at The

Byres ; and though I was beginning to dream my own dreams then, and to long to spread my wings, I stifled my longings for my frail mother's sake, and remained tied to the drudgery of the desk, which had become so irksome to me. So I was at The Byres on that red and still October night when my Aunt Robina came back, a beaten and heart-broken woman, to the happy home where she had been missed day in and day out all the years she had been away.

The Byres was east from Faulds, on the high ground towards the hills of Westerlaw, and there was a march-dyke between the two places. The Byres was not much thought of as a farm ; it had too many stony breadths and cold brae-faces that 'grat a' simmer an' girmed a' winter,' as I've heard my grandfather put it ; but the Wallaces had farmed it for a good many generations, and had aye got a good living off it. I am certain it had the stoniest fields in the whole dale, and I used to be amazed at the great heaps the women workers gathered every year. My grandfather had a curious theory about these stones. I remember one day, when I was a halflin, walking across the fields with him, he gave a big sandy boulder a

kick and a sour look, and said, quite savagely for him :

‘Stanes, Davie ! They grow like weeds. D’ye see that ? if ye leave it lang enough, lad, it’ll grow high enough to split for a kirk steeple, or else braid enough to mak a foondation.’

And from that deep-seated conviction nothing ever made him depart. But in spite of these drawbacks, The Byres was a very comfortable homestead, and the house stood bonnily on the roadside, with a wide gravelled courtyard in front, which gave it a quaint feudal look. It had been one of the stopping-places for the coach in the old days, and the draw-well was still in the yard, and some queer stone benches, where the ostlers used to rest and smoke while the passengers refreshed themselves inside. The house was a fine specimen of the old ‘harled’ building you see so seldom now, and is to this day much admired by those who understand such matters. It had not the slightest claim to modern improvement of any kind ; the ceilings were low and the windows small, but the walls so thick and strong that the word draught had no meaning for us, even when the north wind was skelping the snow down from

the hills, and drifting up every treacherous nook and cranny. When the great painter who immortalised Westerlaw's lost lamb was coming and going that way, he often looked in at The Byres, and he had a long eye after some of the old sticks of furniture, but which were more precious than rubies in my grandfather's sight. I hope I am not too prosy over my description of The Bryes, which I still regard as my home, and which memory has hallowed for me beyond all power of mine to tell.

I well remember the night Aunt Robina came home. We were sitting in the parlour, at the gloaming, on a clear, bright, beautiful October day. The light had lingered nearly an hour beyond its usual, and so clear and delicate was the atmosphere that we could discern plainly the smoke and spires of Edinburgh more than a score of miles distant. And the air had in it that soundless stillness peculiar to October, a stillness which can carry the whirr of a wild-bird's wing or the bleat of a sheep for miles. My grandfather was nodding in his high-backed chair, a picturesque figure in his short knee-breeches and cinnamon-coloured gaiters, with coat and vest of pepper-and-salt tweed, spun from the wool of his

own sheep. At seventy-two he was hale and hearty, able for a whole day in the fields, though he always got drowsy in the evenings, and was glad to go early to bed. It was chilly enough for us to find the glow of the wood-fire pleasant, and as we were all about the hearth, my mother knitting in her low chair, we did not discern anybody approaching the house. But presently we heard the front-door handle turn with the boldness of a familiar hand, and a foot approach our parlour door. And when it opened we looked round startled, for such sudden visitations were not common in our quiet house. A woman entered the room, a tall figure that seemed to fill it, and my mother sprang from her chair with a little cry which awakened my grandfather, who also leaped to his feet.

‘Oh, Robina—Robina Wallace, is it you?’

‘Yes, it’s me,’ was the answer that came back in Aunt Robina’s voice, with all the music gone out of it. ‘Oh, father, father, thankful am I to see ye alive! I was feared to come, in case I should find ye away.’

The poor old man began to tremble, and he tottered forward to the window and took his lost

child by the hand. Then I bethought me to light the tall silver candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and we saw the great change in her who had gone forth from us a bonnie young woman in her sweetest prime. Her face had lost all its delicate bloom, and had grown haggard and hard, though the fine features were unchanged, and the hair, which had been like burnished gold with the sun upon it, was white as the driven snow.

‘Don’t look at me like that, Effie,’ she said to my mother, with a wan, fleeting smile. ‘It makes me think I must be fearsome to look at. I see by your garb that your dear man has gone to a better country. How are you, Davie? Dinna tremble like that, father. I’m all right.’

‘Are ye, lass? ye dinna look it, stealin’ in like a hunted thing. Whaur’s your man?’

‘My man! I hae nane. If ye mean Dick Rat-tray, I havena seen him for five years an’ more. He’s nae man o’ mine. If you’ll bid me sit doon I’ll tell ye the story, an’ it’ll be dune wi’. I’m tired, for I’ve walked frae Braehead Station, not being minded to come out at Faulds among kent folk.’

‘Ye shall not speak a word, Robina, or ye have

rested and had your tea,' said my mother, firmly, and she hung about the stricken woman with all her great motherly heart in her eyes. 'Tell her, father, she must not speak or she be rested and refreshed.'

'I'd rather speak now. I would lay my burden down at the door. If ye knew how heavy it is, Effie, ye wad let me hae my way.'

'Let her be,' said grandfather, speaking dazedly, like a person in a dream.

'Perhaps I had better go away, aunt Robina,' said I, thinking that perhaps the story of a woman's betrayal might not be hearing for me.

'No, bide; it may be a warning to ye, Davie, though God forbid that any sib to me should need sic a warnin',' she said; and laying off the long cloak which had enveloped her from head to foot, and the close-fitting black bonnet which had given her something of a Quaker look, she drew in her chair and sat down. The red light of the wood fire flickered on her face, which, though so worn and sad, had a certain beauty and nobleness in it which sank into my heart.

'It will be seeven year come April,' she began,

staring straight before her, 'sin' I gaed away. Rattray met me at Cape Town, and we were married, as ye ken. He seemed in no hurry to get back to his own place up at the gold-fields, and after a bit he said he didn't think he'd take me up there, for it was very rough, an' no place for a woman body. It was a terrible journey anyway, ten days or mair in a bullock-wagon, in which ye had to sleep as well as travel. He suggested that I should bide down in Cape Town and let him go back to the diggings, and that he'd come as often as he could to see me. That wasna very pleasant hearing for a new-marriet wife, and I said I'd rather gang wi' him an' tak my chance, but in the end he had his way, an' I was left. It was very lonesome at first, though I had some kind friends too, that did their best for me. I had a very comfortable hame an' plenty of money, for he had made a lot, an' was makin' fast. He said that he had only sent for me because he was so anxious to see me, and because he had promised, and that in a year or so we should come hame an' get a farm. He even spoke o' The Byres, when father should retire.'

Here she paused and wiped her pale lips to still

their bitter trembling. 'He came to see me very regularly, and bade a few weeks aye, an' I was tolerably happy, though it was a queer life, an' not what I had been used to or had expected. But yet I was tolerably content, considerin' a'thing, for he was very kind an' lovin', an' grudged me nae-thing under the sun. At the end of eighteen months my bairn cam—my little Effie.'

'Your bairn!' cried my mother, her sweet face flushing. 'Oh, Robina, ye had a bairn and never telt me!'

'No, I couldna—I'm comin' to it. Poor father, ye are vexed,' she said, laying her hand on his knee, and looking into his sad face with affectionate eyes. 'But it is better that ye should hear a' noo; then it'll be done wi'. Weel, efter the bairn cam', Rattray was mair attentive than ever for a time, an' I was mair content. Ye see, she filled a' my heart, an' took awa' the lonely feelin' that had whiles been so hard to bear.

'But in a few months his letters began to fa' aff, an' he cam' very seldom. I was terribly anxious of course, but it wasna till the siller stoppit comin' that I feared a' wasna richt. I worried mysel' nearly into my grave, an' syne, actin' on the advice

o' Mr. Duncan, my minister, I gaed awa' up to the goldfield to see. I left the bairn in Cape Town. Mrs. Duncan took care o' her for me, an' I set awa' oot on the queer pilgrimage which cost me dear. It was very near a fortnicht or I got to the place, which was queer and rough enough, though I saw plenty o' women there, an' naething to hinder me frae bein' there a' the time. An' that angert me an' filled me wi' a sort o' impatience I couldna keep doon. I found that Rattray was weel kent. The first man I asked was able to tell me that he wasna in the settlement that week, but had gaen wi' some ither chaps to prospect a hundred miles or so up the river; but he pointed oot his house to me, and said if I ca'd there his wife would tell me a' aboot him.'

'His wife!' echoed my mother, and her face became white as the soft quilling of her widow's cap. And my grandfather sprang up quivering, with clenched fists and something of the old-time fire in his eyes. As for me, I was blazing, and had Dick Rattray but come in our midst, it must have fared badly with him.

But Aunt Robina paid no heed to us, but kept on steadily in her low, bitter, monotonous voice,

with her sad eyes watching the red heart of the glowing fire.

‘No’ kennin’ very weel hoo I felt, I took his directions, and found the hoose pointed out to me as his, and where I should find Mrs. Rattray. And I did find her, an’ not her alone, but her twa bairns, that Dick could never have denied, since they were his livin’ image. I went in an’ saw the woman an’ spoke wi’ her, an’ then I cam’ awa’.’

She stopped then for a full minute. I have never heard anything more pathetic or significant than the last sentence, the very brevity of which forbade us to ask a single question.

‘She was a puir thing, withoot heart, an’ no’ kennin’ richt frae wrang, which made her a very fit mate for him ; but before I left she proved to me that she was his wife, an’ so, kennin’ what I was, I cam’ awa’, as I said, back to Cape Town to my little nameless bairn.’

Here grandfather groaned, and covered his face with his hands.

‘For a time I was like a being distraught, an’ but for the Duncans, I micht hae taen my ain life, an’ the bairn’s ; but efter a while a kind o’

calmness cam' to me, an' I was able to look ahead and to think.'

'That must be five years ago, Robina,' put in my mother. 'What for did ye no' come hame then?'

'It was the bairn. The pride o' me wadna let me. I had mind on Angus Fleming's mother, an' what she suffered, an' it was pride that wadna let me write, but I wasna withoot friends that helpit me. I opened a little shop, an' was able to mak' bite-an'-sup for her an' me till she was taen awa'.'

'Oh, she's no' deid, is she?' cried my mother. 'I thocht I had her in my arms the noo. Ye did bring her, Robina?'

A convulsive shiver ran through aunt Robina's frame, and her face became, if possible, a shade whiter.

'She's awa'; she dee'd o' a fever five months ago, an' then I couldna thole my life, an' afore I kent where I was they had me on the way hame.'

'Did—did the villain—I daurna name him lest I blaspheme,' cried my grandfather,—'did he never come near ye?'

'No; but he wrote and sent money, which I sent back. I never touched a penny o't, nor set foot in the home he had furnished for me,' she

said, with a certain slow pride. 'No, I hinna forgiven him. I never will. A just God wadna ask as muckle frae a puir woman's heart. The cruelty o' the thing was past forgiveness, as it is well-nigh past speech. That's a'. Can I come hame, father, to be Robina Wallace o' the Byres, as I was afore, and seek peace in the auld hame where I was aince so happy?'

My mother and I rose up then and slipped away, knowing there were some things the old man might wish to say to his desolate and heart-stricken bairn which only God should hear. We had all been amazed at her composure and self-possession, but in the night, my room being next to Aunt Robina's, I heard her strong sobbing, and my heart was sore disturbed and exercised by many rebellious thoughts. For how can a just and tender God suffer such things, or allow such men to cumber the ground? I may have grown wiser since these questioning days, but I have not as yet found any solution of the difficulties which then beset me. So Aunt Robina slipped into her old place at The Byres, and appeared at rest, though there was that in her face which made strangers look at her again and again. For she

had the face of a woman who had been through the furnace, and who had drained the cup of bitter experience to the dregs. She is all alone now at The Byres, save when I go down at holiday times. Lest it should surprise any that I should care to lay bare the heart-sorrow of one dear to me, I may say that when she knew that I was writing these brief records of simple life she asked that her story might be told among the rest.

‘For it micht be a warnin’ to some lassie as glaiket an’ self-willed as I was, laddie,’ she said, with that unspeakable pathos which is inseparable from her now. ‘Oh that I could tak’ all such by the hand and tell them how bitter is the breid that ill-doin’ provides, and what a mockery is mairrage unless it be built on love and respect and the fear of God!’

For this reason alone is the story of my Aunt Robina here set down.



A WRONG RIGHTED

^ A WRONG RIGHTED

THE Free Manse of Faulds stood on the higher part of what was called Church Road, and was a part of the old coaching highway from Carlisle to Edinburgh. It commanded a full, uninterrupted prospect of that magnificent level plain which runs into five counties, and wherein is to be found some of the richest farming land in Scotland. The only soil which beats it in the estimation of agriculturists is the rich red loam of the eastern seaboard from Aberlady Bay to the Northumberland coast, and which has no marrow for potato-growing in the world. Indeed, even in our little suburban greengrocers' shops in great London they will put a penny extra on the pound for 'real Dunbars.' It must not be thought that because I have written so much about the Free Kirk and Free Kirk folk that the Establishment had no prestige in Faulds. It was, and is, far otherwise. There is a fine parish kirk and manse

in the Church Road, and the congregation is large and influential. Of its shepherd, perhaps more anon. The U.P.'s are also represented, by the barn-like building of the Secession, crowded into a back lane behind Tam Laidlaw's shop, and having its ugly dreary little manse close by. But I was reared in the Free, and I know more of the life-histories of the Free folk than the rest.

The Manse had been built for Neil Denham in his time, and was a comfortable, roomy house, without being unduly large or pretentious. Angus Fleming and his mother had made of it a most cosy and pretty home. Being quiet folks, and of limited means, they did not seek to furnish the drawing-room, which the minister had for his study. It was on the upper floor, and had a wide, pleasant oriel window, before which stretched that inimitable and soul-satisfying prospect which changed with every season, and seemed to gain in loveliness with each. Its wideness sank deep into the receptive soul of Angus Fleming, and enabled him to dwell more continuously than most upon the serene heights where pure thought and righteousness abide. We, who have no wideness to contemplate except that of the 'wild, stunning,

tide of human care and crime,' find it mostly easier to grovel than to soar. Yet it may be that we do not entirely lack compensation.

On the ground floor of the manse were two good rooms, but the parlour was the living-room, the dining-room being only used for company.

The minister's mother made an excellent mistress of the manse, and an efficient helpmeet to her son. She affected nothing, neither was she unduly humble, nor did she cheapen herself in any of the relations of her life. She had at last come to believe that the sin of her youth was forgiven, and that her present happiness and peace were the sign and seal of it. So she accepted them thankfully, and, praying continually for light upon her path, was enabled to fill her position with dignity, even with a certain quiet power that set her apart. Even those who had been most bitter against her had been won by the sweetness of her bearing in her new estate; and whoever lacked in respect to Angus Fleming's mother had him to reckon with. And he could be a very fierce fellow when roused, as I well remember, but must not be entered on to-day.

Nine was the manse breakfast hour, and they

were usually punctual to a minute. On a certain October morning about two years after his induction at Faulds, Angus Fleming entered the parlour looking a bit worried and out of sorts. His greeting to his mother was less cheerful than usual, and instead of plunging into his paper at once, he walked to the window, and stood looking out for a few moments in meditative silence. It was late October, and all the corn was ingathered clean from one end of the plain to the other, and the golden tint which the stubble wears just at first had given place to that sober, sad hue which winter loves. But in sheltered places the leaves were 'hingin' yellow' yet, and the scarlet of hip and haw had not quite disappeared. There had been a sharp frost in the night after a tempestuous day of wind and rain, and a lovely and indescribable haze, like a bridal veil, lent a subtle and pensive charm to the whole landscape. But as the minister beheld the bent heads of his stately dahlias blackened and scarified, he sighed because winter had come.

'What ails you, Angus?' his mother asked anxiously, as she took the egg-cosy from the warm tiled hearth. 'Have you not slept?'

‘Yes, mother, but I had an ugly dream, all about Elsie Gourlay; and I can’t forget it. I think she’s in sorer trouble than usual, and that she needs somebody to help her.’

‘If that be your thought, then, Angus, go the day,’ she answered, with that lovely abnegation of self possible to few women, let alone mothers of only sons. ‘Ye can get the ten train.’

‘Oh, I’m not thinking there’s anything requiring such tremendous haste,’ he answered, smiling, gratified by the swiftness with which she put relief in his path. ‘I’ve three very sick folk to see at the Rows, and Robert Jamieson will be here at twelve to see whether we are to let Ann Galbraith’s bairns go to the poor-house. But if you can give me a bite of dinner early, I’ll go at half-past one.’

‘That I can do, and will,’ she replied, as she handed him his tea; and her mouth took on a sweeter curve as she saw the quick gratitude in his eye.

She had a strange feeling, as she watched him go to the station an hour or two later, that he had gone forth to meet some crisis in his life, and that it might be she would very soon find herself

supplanted in the manse. But she was not one to let such a thought trouble her. The Lord had led her hitherto, and would still. That was the main tenet of her creed—a soul-satisfying one, indeed, with which to walk through life.

Elsie Gourlay had taken up and borne her cross uncomplainingly. For more than two years she had been the sole guardian and companion of her frail mother, and though Angus Fleming had at first tried to persuade her to let him share her burden, she had bravely declined. She had sense enough to know that what happened in the little cottage by the sea to which she had retired with her charge, mattered little in comparison with what happened in the Free Manse of Faulds; and that to have such a mother-in-law would do the minister but little good in the place, since with the guilty the innocent must always suffer more or less. So she had made a brave stand upheld in her isolation and bitter trial by the secret consciousness of Divine approval, and a strange sense of nearness to her father, whom she firmly believed was permitted of God to minister to her in her need.

She had rented a cottage villa at the extreme

east end of Levenhall, a sweet little place, with a garden sloping to the pebbly beach. Here it was quiet without being dull, and Edinburgh was near enough to admit of a run in and out of an afternoon. And she was not entirely unhappy, since a life guided by duty brings, day by day, its own compensation, of which the selfish and irresponsible know nothing. The train by which Angus Fleming travelled from Faulds that day was a fast one, which stopped only at Portobello for the taking of the tickets. He got out there and turned his face briskly eastwards for the three-mile walk by the sea, the prospect not unpleasing to him. As he got beyond the precincts of the busy little watering-place, he was struck by the unusual bustle and throng on the road. Carriages, brakes, vans, conveyances of every kind ran each other closely on the usually quiet highway. Presently he saw on a big yellow poster, 'To Musselburgh Races,' and knew he had fallen on an evil day for the place. He found the quaint old town in a hubbub, and the beautiful and quiet walk by the links a vast concourse of people, the air thick with the hoarse yells of the bookmakers and the general riot of a race-

course. He walked on quickly, paying little heed, having no part nor lot in such a scene. His heart grew heavier as he neared his destination, and the conviction that Elsie was in trouble became almost a certainty. Beyond Mrs. Forman's all was quiet, and when he turned the bend in the road and could no longer see the unusual commotion, he could have doubted its existence. The afternoon was raw and chilly, the brief sunshine of the morning having become quickly obscured. The sea tossed grey and restless under the heavy sky, troubled yet by the storm which had only spent itself at the dawn. The beach was strewn with driftwood, and a long line of seaweed, heavy and brown, indicated where the ebb-tide had lately been.

The house occupied by the doctor's widow and daughter was the last of the stragglers on the road. It was a little cottage villa of quite modern construction, and having nothing to distinguish it from its neighbours, except perhaps a certain neatness and fastidiousness of outward appearance, which seemed to indicate careful inmates. It was not very familiar to Angus Fleming; this was but his third visit to it. He found it more

conducive to his peace of mind to seek but few meetings with the woman he loved. And she was of one mind with him. Yet was their faith in each other so absolute and exquisite a thing that no quism or doubt had ever marred it.

The old servant who had been with the Gourlays in Faulds for fifteen years had followed the changed fortunes of her ladies, and she it was who opened the door to the minister that day. He saw trouble in her face the moment his eyes fell on it.

‘Oh, sir!’ she cried, and her tones were shrill with relief. ‘Hoo did ye ken?’

‘Know what? I know nothing, Rachel. What has happened?’ he asked, paling slightly. ‘I hope Miss Elsie is well.’

‘Oh yes, as weel as she can be. It’s the mistress. She gaed oot yestreen, an’ we’ve never seen the face o’ her since. I sair doot the warst has happent.’

‘What worst?’

‘I think she’s drooned. A collier laddie frae Wallyford saw her on the pier at Morison’s Haven late last nicht, but didna ken her.’

‘But how was she suffered to wander about

alone?' asked the minister. 'Surely you knew it could not be safe?'

'She wasna weel yesterday, an' gaed to her bed efter dinner. Miss Elsie was engaged to drink tea along at Loretto, and I thocht it only fitting that I should gang to fetch her, which I did on the back o' seeven. Mrs. Gourlay was sitting up then at the parlour fire in her dressing-goon, feelin' better, an' maist anxious for me to gang to fetch Miss Elsie. So I gaed, thinkin' nae ill. Yes, I see noo it was wrang an' silly, but she's been so much better this while, an' she was so reasonable-like last nicht. I wasna an hoor awa', an' when we cam back she was aff.'

'And you have heard nothing since?'

'Naething excep' what the Wallyford lad said,' said Rachel, wringing her hands in distress.

'Where's Miss Elsie now?'

'Dear kens; awa' wi' the police, I think, to Prestonpans. She forbade me to leave the hoose in case ony word should come. Eh, sir, isn't it awfu'?''

Angus Fleming nodded, and pondered a moment.

'Put on your bonnet, Rachel, and go along in

the 'bus to the post-office with this telegram to my mother.'

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and scribbled the message, which bade his mother come in by the evening train.

'An' will you bide here?'

'Yes; probably Miss Elsie won't be long.'

Rachel departed, nothing loth. The inaction to which she had been condemned all day had been very hard to bear, yet it would have been obviously unwise to shut up the house.

Before Rachel had been gone half an hour, a hired wagonette drove quickly up to the door. In it sat Elsie, and a constable was on the driver's box. Angus had not seen her for nearly six months, and the change in her rent his heart. She was not yet five-and-twenty, but the strain and anxiety of her life had made her old before her time.

A sleepless night, and the horrible anxiety regarding her mother's whereabouts or fate, had lined and seamed her face, and left it without a trace of colour. Her sad eyes looked out from shadowy hollows, haunted by a vague terror and dismay. When she saw Angus Fleming at the door, a great

trembling shook her, and her composure entirely disappeared. He put his arm round her, and drew her within the door, and for a time allowed her convulsive sobbing to have its sway.

‘Forgive me, Angus ; but I feel so weak, and the strain has tried me,’ she said at length. ‘Where is Rachel ? has she told you ?’

‘Yes ; I have sent her with a telegram to my mother. She will come at once, and stay here as long as you need her,’ he said, with a great, unspeakable tenderness. ‘It is not fit for you to be alone.’

‘No, I feel that. I think I was asking God, as I came back, to send some one to me. Things are so hard to bear alone ! Oh, Angus, do you think she is in the sea, and all through my carelessness ? If we hear nothing, and I have to live in this horrible uncertainty, I don’t know what the end will be. Oh, do you think I am very much to blame ?’

‘Hush, hush, my darling ; there has been no carelessness. God in heaven knows how complete has been your devotion and self-sacrifice,’ he made answer, soothingly. ‘You are overwrought, and see things through distorted vision. We must

try to hope for the best. Now tell me what has been done, and all you have heard.'

The tones of his voice raised her sinking heart ; his very presence lifted half the load from her heart. It was indeed, as he had said, not fit that she should be alone, and his heart smote him with a sudden remorse because he had so long suffered her to be alone. What mattered the world's opinion, the cackling of a few village gossips, to the perpetual overshadowing of this unselfish heart, the barrenness of a sweet young life in its prime ? As they talked, he overburdened with such reproachful thoughts, a shadow fell athwart the window, and the constable who had accompanied Elsie in her drive to Prestonpans knocked at the door.

'Wait here, dear ; I'll see him,' said the minister quickly, and she obeyed him gladly, too utterly worn out indeed to protest, but only thankful to roll the burden on to his strong shoulders.

They talked in whispers at the door for some time ; then the man went away, and Angus returned to the sitting-room. She cast one swift glance at his face, and learned therefrom that he had news of the lost one.

‘They have found her, my darling,’ he said, as he took her in his arms, ‘and you must be brave to hear and bear the worst.’

‘Dead?’ she asked, with a shudder, as she hid her face.

‘Yes. The boats came in at Prestonpans just after you had been there,’ he answered, deeming it best to tell her all, and that speedily. ‘One of them found her just outside the harbour at Morison’s Haven, and they are bringing her home. Be brave, my poor darling, and try not to blame yourself too much. You know how often and often she has been near death, even in the old Faulds days when your father was alive. Do you remember the night he found her down the pit-shaft?—Hush, hush; it breaks my heart to see your distress.’

Such was the end of a wasted and miserable life, that had shortened the days of the ‘beloved physician,’ and robbed sweet Elsie Gourlay of her girlhood and youth. Within an hour they brought her home, and the sea, cruel to most, had been not unkind to her, for her face was peaceful and natural-looking, and there was nothing revolting or painful in the sight of her poor drowned body.

Angus Fleming's mother obeyed his summons without delay and was an unspeakable comfort to the stricken girl, remaining with her till all was over.

Then Mrs. Gray of Stanerigg came and took her away, and after that day she looked no more on the place where had occurred the tragedy, the shadow of which will never quite be lifted from her heart this side the grave.

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The Pitbraden carriage had been outside the gate of the Free Manse for a good hour, to the great delay and detriment of the after-dinner labours of sundry housewives in Church Road. It was not altogether an unusual sight, for exchange of courtesies were frequent between the big house and the manse, but never had it been known to stand so long, and the horses were getting so restive that they had to be walked smartly up and down. Besides, the minister was out at the funeral of one of the Barleyknowe ploughmen, and what Mrs. Giles Braden and Mrs. Fleming could find to say to each other for a mortal hour was a matter of lively, almost painful conjecture. Could they but have overheard the conversation taking place in the manse parlour, how

great would have been their amazement, almost their dismay! Mrs. Giles Braden was respected rather than beloved in Faulds, though the hot-tempered, warm-hearted Colonel was adored. She was the daughter of an old and proud Highland family, and was of a reserved and distant nature, that did not readily accommodate itself to new surroundings. She was the mother of one son, the heir to Pitbraden, a lad who had been weakly from his birth, and was not likely to live to enjoy his inheritance. Trouble had softened and made tender his mother's proud heart, and there was some quality in the sympathy, often unspoken, of Jean Fleming that comforted her inexpressibly, and of late the two women, between whom there was such an odd and trying relationship, had drawn much together.

'The Colonel has had Giles at Edinburgh again,' she said abruptly, almost without greeting, that afternoon. 'He was fortunate in seeing Sir Andrew Clark, who is up on a visit, and they are all agreed that my boy can never have a long life.'

She threw back her veil with rather an impatient gesture, and her handsome face wore a slightly hard, bitter look.

‘We must go abroad again not later than Christmas, Sir Andrew says, and, to make sure we escape the east winds, on no account to return before June. He advises San Remo. I have come to see if you can go with me.’

Jean Fleming looked the unfeigned surprise she felt.

‘I! What for, Mrs. Braden? Of what use could I be?’

‘You comfort me,’ she replied, with an odd fleeting smile. ‘You are so true, and in trouble you are so strong and brave. Oh yes, I know many people, but those who know many have often fewest friends. The Colonel does not care for the Riviera. He prefers Pitbraden in its harshest moods. Probably he would visit us occasionally. He knows I have come here to-day, and on what errand. Will you come?’

Mrs. Fleming looked perplexed, and remained silent. She was inwardly touched, and her heart went out to the stricken woman, whose wealth and social position were powerless to shield her from the sorrows of the heart.

‘Your sisters,’ she said at length. ‘Can none of them go?’

'They would not if they could. They belong to the gay world, and they do not care to be saddened by sickness or anxiety. It is you I want. It is your son you are thinking of. Couldn't he marry Miss Gourlay before we went? The Colonel suggested that. I called on her at Stanerigg the other day. She is a sweet, lady-like girl. Let them set conventionalities at naught, and marry at once. It has to come one day; you know that.'

'Oh yes, I am prepared for it; Angus knows that,' replied Jean Fleming, and her voice had no tremor in it.

'Then if I suggest it, nay, urge it, will you help me? Believe me, my need is great. You will never regret it. If you accompany us, it will be as my sister, and in no other capacity.'

Jean Fleming's eyes overflowed. Such recognition by the family of the man she had regarded as her husband was sweet indeed, and fraught with the richest compensation for much that she had suffered.

'I leave myself in your hands,' she said simply. 'If it can be arranged, I will go.'

After such a concession, Mrs. Giles Braden did

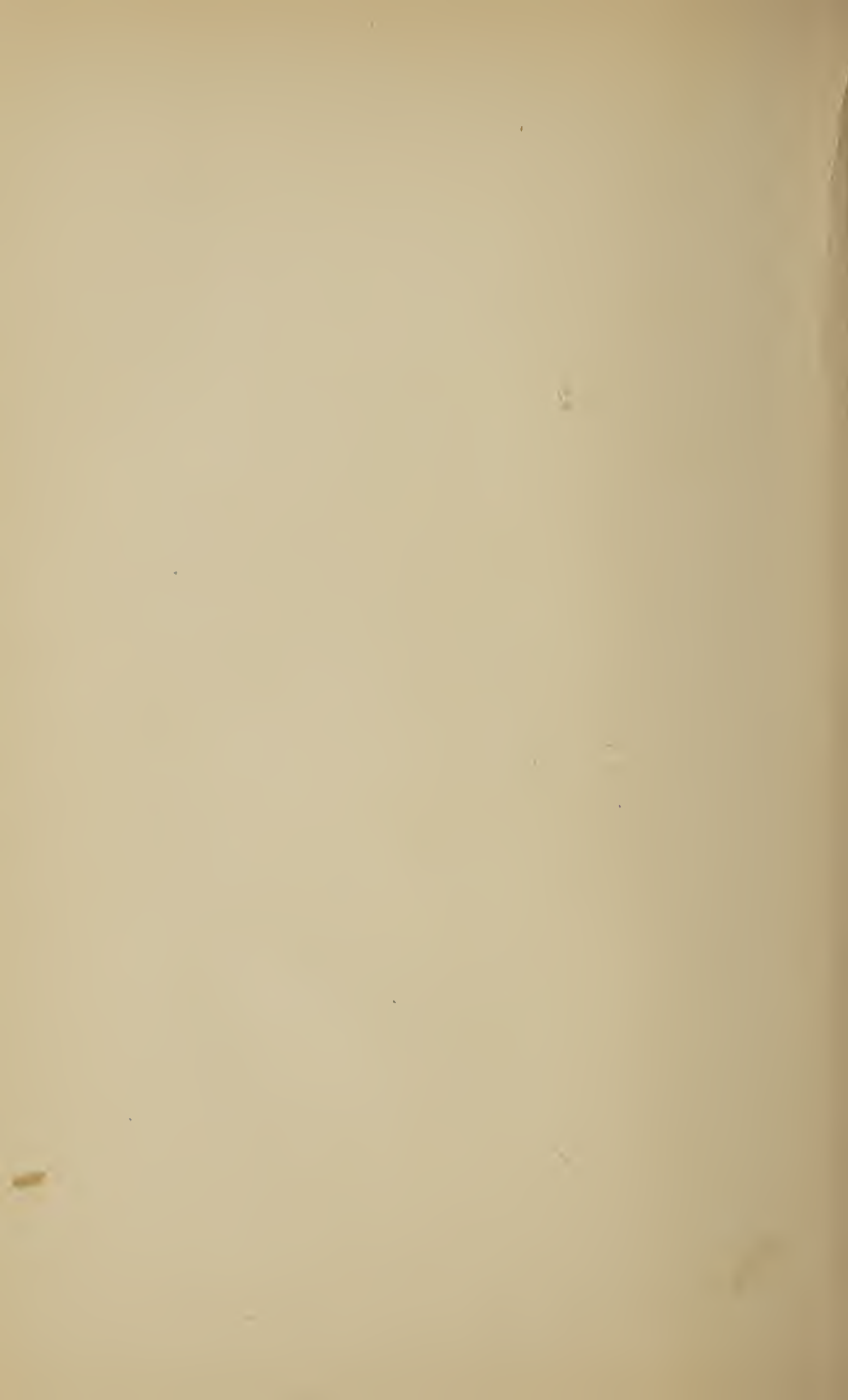
not remain idle, and the close of the year witnessed such strange happenings in Faulds that the gossips were thunderstruck. The week before Christmas the Free Church minister was married at Stanerigg to Elsie Gourlay, and the Colonel and Mrs. Giles Braden were at the wedding. They went to London for ten days, and then returned to the manse, which the minister's mother immediately left, accompanying Mrs. Giles Braden and her son to the South. What did these things portend? It was many months before the solution of the mystery was arrived at, and then they wondered that it had not been clear to them all along. Early in May young Giles Braden died at San Remo, and they brought him home to lie in Faulds kirkyard. Great was the speculation as to what would then become of the minister's mother, and it was quite expected that she would return to the manse. But apparently they had still need of her at Pitbraden, for there she remained.

Some months later, the Colonel publicly announced at the audit dinner that Angus Fleming would be his heir, and that he had consented to take the name of Fleming-Braden, though

desirous for the present to continue his ministry to the Free Church of Faulds. So a bitter wrong was righted in the end, righted as it could only have been by noble and generous hearts in whom the Spirit of God dwelt. For three years Angus Fleming-Braden continued his fruitful ministry in Faulds, blessed and helped by his sweet wife. Then he was called to a different sphere. After his uncle's death, he saw the anomaly it was for a Laird of Pitbraden to be also minister in Faulds, and the injustice it did to some man still looking for his life-work. So he laid his seals of office down, but only God knew what the sacrifice cost him. For he was a born preacher, and happier in his calling than most. But what is life—the higher life at least—made up of, after all, but sacrifice, which is the crown of every noble effort?

Of course there did not lack the evil-minded and the venom-tongued, who attributed other motives to him and his. Yet what need we care even if the finger of scorn points at us, if we be at peace with the God who trieth the reins and searcheth the hearts of the children of men?

MERCY, NOT JUDGMENT



^ MERCY, NOT JUDGMENT

I HAVE had occasion more than once to mention Inneshall, which was the great house in the Dale. Pitbraden was a comparatively small place, and the Bradens had never been pretentious, but simple, kindly, unostentatious folk, making no boast of their lineage, though they might have done so without reproach. The Inneses were cast in a different mould. Certainly their family was old, and part of the mansion-house dated from the twelfth century. The estate had passed in direct descent from father to son without a break all through these centuries, which had witnessed the rise and fall of many a great house. It almost seemed as if Inneshall were exempt from the ordinary vicissitudes of life. There had never been a mesalliance nor a ne'er-do-weel in the family. But they were not a prolific race; only one or two children at a time were seen in the great house, which had sore need of something

to brighten it. It was open to visitors as a show place at certain times of the year, but never for a long space, for like all who have been bred in the Dale, the Inneses loved their home, and were not happy away from it. They had never made themselves affable or homely among Faulds folk, though those who had dealings with them spoke well of them as just, kind, but distant, never seeming to forget that between the Inneses and ordinary folks there was a great gulf fixed. There never had been a title in the family, though many a one had been offered ; plain Mr. Innes of Innes-hall each head of the house had lived and died.

When I was a wild loon of Adam Fairweather's school, playing truant sometimes with Jock and other kindred spirits, pursuing fearful joys in the shape of rasps and brambles in the Inneshall woods, I was in mortal terror of meeting Mr. Claud Innes, the young Laird, who had no quarter for the evil-doer, and looked as if it were not possible that he could ever have been a laddie himself. He was an only child, and grew up lonelily. The kind mothers of many bairns pitied the poor little lad at Inneshall, who, by reason of his rank and estate, was shut off from the homely pleasures of

life ; and I know that some prayed for him. I have heard my mother say that my grandmother never forgot Claud Innes in her prayers, though I suppose his proud father would have resented such a liberty on the part of his tenant's wife. Little Claud grew up lonelily, and became a shy, reserved, taciturn man, fond of his books, and content apparently among the seclusion of his own woods, taking a keen interest in the management of his estate, but not seeking to be neighbourly or sociable, or to take his proper place in the county.

The Inneses seldom married young, and Claud was forty years of age before he brought a wife to Inneshall. Well do I remember the excitement in Faulds the first Sabbath he appeared in the Inneshall pew in the parish church, and how the Free was that day almost deserted in the anxiety to behold the new lady of the manor. She was a sweet, gentle creature, looking sadly young and girlish to have the burden of a great estate upon her ; and many wondered afterwards how she had ever fancied such a grave, solemn, forbidding-looking husband as Inneshall. We soon heard the ins and outs of the story, for gossip travels far and quickly, especially when it concerns folk that

the world calls great. She was the daughter of an English rector, connected with some of the best English families, and had come from a happy home, where there was a merry band of brothers and sisters. It was also told that she had been given no voice in the matter, but had been bidden take the rich and well-born lover who came to woo her. Yet, if it were true, she did not look miserable, just at first. I remember well how she sat that day between her father-in-law and her husband, their stern faces seeming to enhance her gentle fairness. The old man looked at her much and often, and it was my fancy to think that an unwonted tenderness softened his clear-cut, haughty features, and that the piercing eyes under the shaggy white brows gleamed less hardly than usual. As for Claud himself, he did not look like a newly-married husband sitting beside his fair young wife. He had married to please his father, so that there might be an heir to Innes-hall, and had chosen one young and gentle, so that she might not be a trouble to him, but would do his bidding in all things. So they shut the sweet young creature up in the great house among the solitudes of their lonely woods, and things

went on as before. Sometimes during the first few months she might have been seen riding about the roads near Inneshall, never, strangely enough, in the company of her own husband, who might have been proud to ride by the side of one so dear, but generally escorted by the old Laird, who rode gallantly yet, in spite of his seventy years. And when gradually the shadow began to creep over her face, it lightened most when the old man was by her side, and was deepest when her husband was nearest to her. And those who knew said that but for the old Laird, the key to whose withered heart she had found, she must have pined and died like a lily on its stalk. For Claud Innes was a fearsome, gloomy man, subject to fits of passionate temper, and of a proud, revengeful, suspicious nature that could not brook the sunshine of happy nonsense, and was a kill-joy wherever he appeared.

When Mrs. Claud came first to Inneshall, she paid a visit formally to the house of every tenant on the estate. All spoke well of her winning way, and she seemed kind and interested in each ; but, like gentle and simple alike, she found something that warmed and cheered her heart at Stanerigg,

where the smile of Lisbeth Gray made sunshine even when there seemed none elsewhere. And as time went on she came again and again to Stanerigg, nobody knew how often. Certainly her husband had no idea of it, else had it been promptly stopped. For the Inneses were ever proud and kept their distance, even from those whom they regarded as their equals. But I put it to you, could there be a more pitiful sight than that frail, motherless creature shut up in the great house with two men who had no knowledge of the ways or needs of women, and no sympathy with them? It is certain that it was the homely mothering of the dear mistress of Stanerigg which made life possible to Mrs. Claud Innes during the first twelve months of her new estate. So the time went on, until it became Faulds gossip that the heir was expected at Inneshall. All were interested, and those who looked into the heart of things prayed that all might go well, and that the little bairn might make all the sunshine needed in the old house, and most of all thaw the icebound heart of its master. It was Dr. Gourlay's lot to be called to Mrs. Claud in her hour of need, and he was the whole night and a part of a day at

Inneshall, and the suspense and anxiety were very great.

He drove out by the north lodge of Inneshall about twelve o'clock in the day, and though he knew that there would be more work lying at home than he could accomplish in an afternoon he turned in at Stanerigg road-end for a word with his old friend.

It was the month of July, and Stanerigg garden was laden with fruit. It happened that Lisbeth Gray was picking her red currants when she heard the rumble of the gig on the avenue. She stepped up between the rows of late peas whose pods were swelling finely in the sun, and called to him over the mossy dyke. She had her skirts kilted and a pink cotton sun-bonnet on her head, and her basket half-filled with the luscious fruit on her arm.

'Hulloa, Doctor, what ails ye?' she called cheerily. 'We're no needin' doctorin' here the day.'

He vaulted from the seat and crossed the grass to the wall before he spoke.

'I've been at Inneshall since last night,' he replied. 'The bairn has come.'

‘Everything richt?’ she asked eagerly. ‘And is it an heir?’

Something in the Doctor’s look struck her, and her expression changed from bright expectation to concern.

‘No, it’s a lass bairn, and there’s something wrong. It is a poor little thing, and so unwelcome save to its mother, that it were better, I think, had it not seen the light.’

‘Is’t no wise and world-like, Doctor?’ she asked, in an awe-stricken voice, and he shook his head.

‘Time will tell. Her very sex is a disappointment to Mr. Claud. Eh, yon’s a sour, proud heart, friend, and I left that great house with a sad heart. I have never seen a more waesome spectacle than that poor lassie in her trouble. You were sore needed this day at Inneshall, and I was very near sending for you on my own responsibility.’

‘Has she no’ a woman-body near her?’

‘Oh, plenty, such as they are—servants and hired folk. And there’s a nurse there that needed the downsetting I gave her at six o’clock this morning. She calls herself a trained nurse; faugh!’

The Doctor snapped his fingers, and looked the disgust he felt.

‘And the dear young leddy, how is she?’

‘Oh, she’ll do all right. She’s young, and life is strong at two-and-twenty. I wish you had seen Mr. Claud when I told him; and he wouldn’t come near the room, nor even send a message to his wife. I felt very near telling him it was a judgment on him.’

‘Wheesht,’ said Lisbeth Gray gently, and her eyes, earnest with feeling, watched the sunlight dancing among the green boughs and playing with their shadows on the grass. Then she added, more to herself than to him, ‘Nay, it is mercy, not judgment, our God delights in.’

And the Doctor, soothed and cheered as usual, nodded gravely, and went his way.

‘Mercy, not judgment.’ The words lingered long in his ears, and longer in his heart. But he did not live to see their fulfilment.

It is possible for poor folk, if they be so minded, to hide their troubles and heartaches from the world, but the sorrows of a great house are not easily hid. It was not long before it began to be whispered about that the Inneshall bairn was not

like other bairns, and that if it lived, could be nothing but a care to its parents. After this great disappointment Mr. Claud Innes was seen even less about Faulds, nor did the old Laird and the young lady ride together as before. It was as if they had shut their gates to keep the outside world from knowing of their sorrow.

One day in winter, when the bairn might have been about six months old, a carriage from Innes-hall drove up to Stanerigg, and a note was handed in for Mrs. Gray, to wait an answer.

It was Upkeith market-day, and Stanerigg was absent; the mistress had just taken her early dinner, and was thinking to lie down for an hour when the message came. It was very brief, a few lines in Mrs. Claud's handwriting asking Mrs. Gray to return to Innes-hall with the carriage. Wondering much, yet not at all put about, Mrs. Gray got herself ready, and rode away to Innes-hall as if it were an every-day occurrence. It was her perfect unconsciousness, her natural and simple demeanour in all circumstances, that endeared her to everybody.

About six o'clock, as he was driving home, Stanerigg met an Innes-hall carriage at his own

road-end, and wondered much on what errand it had been to his house. His wife had just got off her bonnet and cloak, and his tea was ready for him when he entered the sitting-room, warmed and cheered as usual by the brightness and comfort of his own fireside.

‘I thocht I met a coach frae Inneshall at the road-end, Lisbeth,’ he observed as he threw himself into his chair. ‘Was it here?’

‘Yes, it brocht me back. I hae been there a’ the efternune, sent for by Mrs. Claud on the back o’ ane o’clock.’

‘What for?’

‘To see the bairn,’ she said. ‘Oh, faither, the hand o’ the Lord is heavy on Inneshall, whatever be His purpose.’

‘What ails the bairn? Is’t, as they say, an object?’

She nodded gravely, and her sweet eyes were full of tears.

‘It’s misshapen, a’ but its face, which micht belang to an angel. An’ an angel it is to the heart o’ its puir young mither. Eh, that man, Robert, he deserves but ill o’ his Maker. He winna look at the bairn, an’ has hardly spoken to his wife since the birth.’

'Did she tell ye that, Lisbeth?' asked Stanerigg, amazed at the whole occurrence, although well accustomed to his wife's acquaintance with the inner concerns of many lives.

'She did. Yes, Claud Innes, great man though he be, deserves but ill o' his Maker, an' he will not be forgotten for his cruelty to the young wife he has ta'en awa' frae a' her folk to shut her up in yon dungeon.'

'An' what does the auld Laird say?'

'Naething, but does what he can to comfort the puir lassie. Eh, Robert, I'm thankfu' that you an' me's plain folk, and that we arena fashed wi' sic pride as yon. Money an' great estate, what are they but a curse to the maist feck o' them that has them?'

Stanerigg saw that his wife was moved beyond her wont, and that a just indignation was for a time being uppermost in her mind.

'Will it live?'

'There is nae reason why it shouldna, though the puir lamb wad be happier wi' Him that said, "Suffer the children." But nae doot the Lord'll bring guid oot o' evil in His ain time.'

'Ay, ay,' said Stanerigg musingly. 'It's very

stupid o' the young Laird to carry on as he does. There may be ither bairns, an' plenty o' them, in Inneshall yet.'

His wife shook her head.

'She says no; an' things bein' as they are atween them, it micht be better no,' she said; then, as if wishing to change the subject, asked whether anything new had transpired in Upkeith since the last big market, and what old friends he had met.

Time went on, and no other child came to Innes-hall, and the little one lived and grew, and as is often seen in those physically afflicted, the mental powers far exceeded the bodily, and the little Irene, as she was called, was far beyond her years. Many stories of her precocity found their way to Faulds, and it was told how the child so afflicted was yet like a gleam of sunshine in the old house, warming all hearts. Every one loved her; there was not a servant in the house who did not consider it an honour and a privilege to be allowed to wait upon her, or to wheel into the grounds the invalid carriage from which she could, lying on her back, see the fresh green boughs of the old trees waving against the summer sky. Very often

the old laird walked by the side of the little carriage, and when the child began to speak and to understand, his delight in, and fondness for her was a thing to marvel at. She had a sweet face, lit by a pair of large, pathetic dark eyes, and her voice had something more than the ordinary sweetness of childhood. It was the very music of the spheres to her mother's heart. She was beloved by all, and loved all in return, but, strange as it may seem, the child's heart seemed to go out with passionate adoration to the stern, silent father, who seldom spoke to her, and never kissed or caressed her. If he came near her, a visible excitement seemed to possess her, his very footstep sent a flush to her pale cheek, and a light of expectancy to her eyes.

‘Mamma,’ she said one day, ‘do you think papa would love me better if I were dead?’

‘Hush, hush, my darling,’ said Alice Innes brokenly, and her own face took on a hard and bitter look.

Nature had cast her in a gentle mould, but since her wedding-day the iron had entered into her soul; and when these words fell from the child's lips, she said to herself that she would

never forgive him, never while she lived. It chanced one day that Claud Innes passed by the door of the large and pleasant room set apart for his little daughter's use, and saw that she was alone. It was a winter's day, and the sun was near its setting. Through the bare boughs of the noble trees the sky was blood-red, flecked with gold, a wonderful sunset; and the child's eyes were fixed upon it with a strange, far-away, yearning look. They had wheeled her chair close to the wide, low window, so that she might lose nothing, and the glory was reflected on her face.

The father who had denied her the loving-kindness and tender pity which ought to dwell in a man's heart for his own, stood unobserved a moment looking at her through the half-open door, and something in her face struck him, and held him rooted to the spot. He had never suffered himself to study her face, and he was astonished now by its exquisite beauty. It was a beauty which belonged not to this earth, and a chill, strange fear smote him to the heart. For the first time in all the years the child had been in the house, something of the fatherly spirit stirred in him, and

he stepped across to her side. At his step her face flushed, and she turned to him eagerly, yet with a certain shrinking which did not escape him.

‘Why are you alone, Irene?’ he asked, and the child had never heard him speak so gently.

‘Oh, I shall not be long alone, papa. Miss Weston has gone to Edinburgh to-day, and Hewitt is down at tea. Mamma will be here presently. It is almost her time.’

‘Are you feeling less well than usual?’ he asked awkwardly, half ashamed of the unusual question.

‘No, papa,’ she answered brightly. ‘Better, I think.’

‘What were you thinking about as I came in?’

She flushed still more, and was silent a moment, but presently spoke, the habit of obedience being strong upon her.

‘I was wondering whether in heaven they could see the sunsets,’ she replied in a low voice, and he turned upon his heel as if to leave the room, but her sweet, entreating voice kept him back.

‘Papa, won’t you kiss me before you go?’

He bent over her without a spoken word, and

she clasped her arms passionately about his neck ; and her soft cheek touched his, and held him.

When he left her, his face was wet with her tears. His hand trembled as he turned the handle of his wife's sitting-room door, after he had been bidden enter in response to his knock. She regarded him with a faint surprise ; he sought her society so seldom, and there was so little sympathy or union of interest between them.

'I have just seen Irene, Alice,' was his unexpected remark. 'Do you think she is as well as usual?'

'No,' she answered, in a dull, cold voice. 'She has not been well for a long time.'

'Why did you not tell me?' he asked, with that touch of imperiousness characteristic of him. She turned her fair head then, and looked him full in the face. He never forgot that look. It haunted him years afterwards even in his happiest moods.

'I must go to her,' she said, exactly as if he had not spoken, and passed him by without further remark.

His face betrayed little sign of the sting she had given him, and after standing meditatively for a few minutes, he left the house, and rode into

Faulds to consult Dr. Gourlay, to that good man's no small amazement. The result was that a great man was summoned from London, and at his suggestion yet another, and many grave consultations took place regarding the health of little Irene Innes. Claud Innes asked that the truth might be told, and they did not seek to hide it. They were agreed that six months was the limit of the child's life. Then a great wonder was seen at Inneshall, the awakening of a father's heart to all its yearning love and keen sense of responsibility. The one cloud was lifted from the child's heart, and the love she had lavished on her father was now returned a hundredfold. He could not bear to see a shadow on her face. When she was in weariness and pain he would carry her for hours in his strong arms, and could soothe her when all else failed. The mother looked on, wondering much, sometimes conscious of a slight sense of bitterness at seeing herself so supplanted, yet grateful to him for his gentleness, his unfailing, untiring tenderness with the child; grateful, but nothing more. She never voluntarily addressed him, and they continued to live apart as strangers under one roof. She lived through an unusually

bitter spring, and when summer came was able to go out again among her beloved trees to watch the green boughs waving against the tender sky. One day, as her father walked by her side, she proffered a strange request, and because he could deny her nothing, it was granted. Her governess had been reading to her the story of a poor little outcast child who lived in the slums of a great city. The story had laid hold of the sensitive heart, and a strange desire had come to her—to look with her own eyes upon the city, which she had never seen but in her dreams. The next day they drove her all the way to Edinburgh, and along the noble stretch of Princes Street; but though she looked about with interested eyes, she was not satisfied, but wanted to see the quarters of the poor. Then they drove through the old town and along many poor streets where the gutter children played; and when the little Irene looked upon their pale faces and naked feet, a great sadness gathered in her eyes.

‘I have seen enough, papa,’ she said at length. ‘Let us go home.’ She was very quiet all the way, and they feared it had been too much for her. When her father went to her bedside late that

night and found her still awake, it troubled him.

‘You must not think too much of what you saw to-day, my darling.’

‘I do think of it, papa. May I ask you something?’

‘Yes, my darling.’

‘I want you and mamma to send and bring a lot of those poor little children down here for a day, so that I may show them my trees, and let them see the country for once. Will you, papa?’

‘Yes, it shall be done; if you will promise me not to brood, but to sleep, I will go and arrange about it to-morrow.’

She promised him, and closed her eyes with a satisfied smile. Then Claud Innes went down to the drawing-room, where his wife was, and told her of the child's wish. They together discussed the details of its fulfilment, as two strangers might have discussed them, gravely and formally; yet was there visible now in Alice Innes's demeanour towards her husband a gentleness which had long been absent from it. He felt it at times like a benediction upon him; but remembering the past, he feared to hope.

A few days later there was a great gathering in the park of Inneshall, to the great talk and consternation of the good Faulds folk. City missionaries, and poor-inspectors, and managers of children's homes had all been consulted, and the result was a large and motley gathering of the waifs and strays who were given one long day's rich enjoyment. There went in and out among them all day long the pathetic figure of the little ailing daughter of the house in her donkey carriage; and when the little ones, won by the sweetness of her smile, brought their posies of wild-flowers to show her, there was in her eyes an absolute content, which those who loved her understood.

'Oh, it has been such a happy day, papa,' she said when they came to say good-night to her after all was over. 'Such a happy, happy day! Thank you so much.'

'Are you not too tired to sleep?' he asked jealously, and her mother laid her soft hand on the child's brow and smiled down at her.

'No, no. I shall sleep sound, sound. Good-night.' She kissed her mother first as she did always. Then, when her father bent over her, she

whispered, 'Won't you kiss mamma too?' The blood rushed into his face, but his wife became a shade paler, and sought to turn away. The child eyed them with a wistful, questioning look, which was reflected on Claud Innes's face as he bent towards his wife and touched her cheek with his lips for the first time for years. Then the child turned upon her pillow, with a smile of ineffable content, and fell asleep. Not to wake any more in the world where her sojourn had been one of weariness and renunciation and pain. Her work was done. They found her lying as they had left her; and she had never looked so lovely in life as she now did, with the light of heaven lingering on her face. The mother, the solace and joy of whose loveless life she had so long been, found some balm for her awful grief in looking upon the peace which sealed her darling's face. She was so standing when her husband entered the room. No need to ask if he suffered. It was written on his face. He knelt down by the bed and bowed his head on his folded arms, and his wife, not shrinking from him as was her wont, looked down upon him with something of pity in her gentle eyes. For in his pain there was that terrible

element of remorse which makes even a light grief seem at times intolerable. Then, moved by a strange impulse, she laid her hand on his head, and presently was on her knees at his side, his arm clasping her, his prayer for forgiveness and love falling on her ears.

The hour of their most bitter grief witnessed also the dayspring of love and blessed hope. Thus the child to whom her mother had given almost in mockery the peace name, having fulfilled God's purpose on earth, went home.

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Within the year another child was born to the house of Inneshall, a bonnie boy, strong of limb and will, who inaugurated a new era in the quiet old house. He was the darling and the pride of all, and the light which shone in his mother's happy eyes betrayed a gladness which nothing could touch or mar. But the little sister, the child-angel whose visitation to Inneshall had been fraught with such great issues, is not forgotten. Husband and wife, now one in heart, bound together by the ties of no common love, have her shut deep in their hearts ; and when they speak of her, they feel that they touch the gates of

heaven. Her memorial is not lacking in Faulds. Not very far from the gates of Inneshall, on a sheltered brae-face, there is a country home for the waifs and strays of the city, and the stone above the doorway bears these words :

TO THE LOVED MEMORY OF
IRENE MARGARET,
ELDEST CHILD OF CLAUD AND ALICE INNES.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the children
of God.’

THE TENANT OF LISTON-
SHIELDS

THE TENANT OF LISTONSHIELS

ONE day Robert Gray took home sad news from Upkeith market to his wife. She saw that something had upset him the moment he set foot within the door.

‘What ails ye, faither? Ye look as if ye had gotten a fright,’ she said cheerily, yet with a certain anxiety note in her voice.

‘So I hae, Lisbeth,—a fricht an’ a warnin’. Matthew Harden’s deid in Listonshiels.’

‘It canna be, Robert,’ she replied, in a startled voice. ‘I saw him in the kirk on Sabbath aicht days as weel as you or me.’

‘It’s true though, Lisbeth; the haill market’s fu’ o’t the day.’

‘What did he dee o’?’

‘That’s the ill bit o’t a’, wife. He hanged himsel’ in his ain barn last nicht efter darkenin’. Wad ye ever ha’e thocht Matthew Harden wad come by sic an unholy end?’

Mrs. Gray's face blanched a little, and she began to tremble. She could not now bear such sudden shocks with the calm strength of long ago.

'Mercy me, that's terrible! What gar't him dae sic an awfu' thing?'

'Hard times, they say, an' him no' able to meet his rent. But I doot there's something at the back o't. Onyway, it's a terrible thing for his wife an' his lassie.'

'It is that; she's been a puir extravagant wife to him, an' she's gotten her punishment, puir body. I'm wae for her. What wad ye say to gang ower, faither? Maybe I could be o' some use to them.'

'I'll yoke if ye like,' he replied readily; 'if it'll not be ower muckle for ye. Ye are wearied-like, wife, an' it micht no dae ye ony guid.'

'I'd like to gang,' she replied, simply. 'Maybe folk 'll be keepin' awa'. If I'm no needit, there 'll be nae harm dune.'

She went to get on her bonnet and cloak without any further word, and in ten minutes she and her husband were comfortably seated in the little gig, to which a fresh horse had been harnessed.

It was a considerable drive to Listonshiels, which lay away up among the hills beyond Easterlaw.

It was the first week in May, and though the evening air had a touch of sharpness in it, its lovely freshness and clearness seemed to cause the familiar landscape to stand out with the sharp beauty of a cameo. Each rising hillock and blossoming tree was outlined against a sky exquisite in hue, a subdued twittering from every hedgerow whispered of boundless hopes, the whole earth teemed with promise and with the loveliest promise. The beauty of it sank into Lisbeth Gray's heart, as it had done many and many a time during the years in which her lot had been cast amid these fair scenes.

‘Every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile,’

she said, in a dreamy undertone. ‘Oh, faither, I hae never seen the marrow o’ that bonnie view. Hoo mony spires can we coont atween this an’ Arthur’s Seat? Where there be kirks an’ godly folk, there’s peace and plenty for man an’ beast.’

‘Whiles,’ answered Stanerigg, absently also, for his thoughts were occupied with the affairs of Listonshiels. ‘I wunner noo whether Jamie Hal-

dane wadna like to tak' in Listonshiels. He could easy dae it; he had hauf the winterin' the year, onyway. Fegs, I'll mention it till him. I wadna like to see a stranger in the place, Lisbeth.'

'Let Listonshiels hiss' be at peace afore ye pit onybody in his place, Robert. Besides, Mrs. Harden nicht want to bide oot the lease. She could do it weel enough wi' a guid grieve.'

'She'll no fash, my wummin; she hasna as muckle in her,' Stanerigg replied drily. 'Besides, unless I'm sair mista'en, there'll be a roup an' a flittin' afore Mairtimas.'

With that they turned in at the gate of Listonshiels, and drove through the fir wood to the house. It was a cold, big barn of a place, built of black whinstone, which even the sweet May sunshine could not warm. It was very tidy about the garden ground, and all the blinds were drawn decorously down, nor was there any sign of life about the place but the faint upward curl of the smoke from the kitchen chimney. Stanerigg said he'd wait in the gig till his wife went to the house, and that if she wanted him to unyoke or to come in, she could send out word, which she said she would do. She knocked softly at the

door, and then more loudly, getting no response. At length the door was opened suddenly, and Janet Harden stretched out both her hands, indicating the welcome she could not speak. She was a very ordinary, plain-looking person, of large features and sallow complexion, taking after Listonshiels himself. Mrs. Gray had never seen the likeness so strongly as at that moment.

‘Eh, lassie, this is a sair trouble ! I only cam’ to ask if there’s onything I can dae,’ she said, with fervent though quiet sympathy. ‘What fettle is your puir mother in?’

‘Come in, Mrs. Gray ; she’d like to see you, I know,’ answered Janet Harden, and closed the door. Then she led the way into the darkened dining-room, where the new-made widow sat crouching in a big easy-chair, with her handkerchief before her eyes.

She stretched out her hand, without removing her handkerchief or looking at her visitor, and Mrs. Gray took it limply. She had never been very intimate with her neighbour at Listonshiels ; the difference in the nature and temperaments of the two women forbade it.

Janet set a chair for their visitor and moved

about the room nervously, touching the furniture with uncertain fingers, as if she felt some strange strain upon her, as indeed she did.

By-and-by her mother took down her handkerchief and permitted her face to be seen. It was a pretty face still, though fifty years had left some traces on it, but it was the face of a woman who had never probed to the heart of things, and from whom the deeper meanings of life were hid.

'I am wae for ye, my dear,' said Mrs. Gray, simply. 'Is there onything I can do, or my man, to help ye in your hour of need? He's ootby waitin', but will come in if ye like.'

'That is very kind. You are the first who has called. I think people have been so unsympathetic and cruel,' cried the widow, her blue eyes welling with tears. 'Isn't it a dreadful, an awful thing? so inconsiderate to give us all such a fearful shock. I shall never get over the horror of it. I see it at night, and whenever I am alone. Janet knows I do, and yet she leaves me. I wish I were dead too.'

'Time will help ye, my dear,' said Mrs. Gray soothingly, but at the same time casting a look of

sympathy at the somewhat ungainly figure of Janet moving about the room. She did not know Janet Harden very well, but she had often been struck in the kirk by the somewhat sad expression on her face, and also by a look of quiet strength and endurance which made her interesting, and set her apart, as it were, from other folk. But these fine distinctions were not visible to the casual eye, and to most Matthew Harden's only daughter was a very ordinary and commonplace person, more useful than ornamental. This view her mother, by her treatment and demeanour, unconsciously strengthened. Her plain looks and her quiet, reserved disposition were a great disappointment to her mother, who was gay and pleasure-loving, and there was less sympathy and love between them than is common between mother and daughter.

‘It’s a terrible thing, and I can’t think what drove him to it. Mr. Oliphant was here from Gairbrig to-day, and he says he has been in difficulties and behind with the rent for a long time. But how could I help that? I’m sure I have been pleased with very plain things since I came to Listonshiels, and it is very hard to

come down, and to have people even hinting that you have helped to bring the trouble on your husband. That's what Mr. Oliphant hinted at to-day, but I think I astonished him, and he won't mention it again, and all because I said I couldn't and wouldn't do with less than fifty pounds for my mourning.'

At that Janet opened the door suddenly, and went out. Mrs. Gray guessed that she could bear no more.

'I have very little comfort in Janet. She was all for her father always. What's to become of her, do you think, if there's nothing left? She'll just need to go out as a housekeeper, or something of that kind. It's a pity she's so plain, for no man, I fear, would ever look at her, and she's getting on too. She'll be six-and-twenty in July.'

'There'll be a place for Janet found, Mrs. Harden; you needna worry over that,' said Mrs. Gray, with conviction, and would have liked if she could have said a lot more, but consideration for the widow restrained her.

'Well, I'm sure if you hear of anybody who wants a housekeeper or a useful help, especially about a farm town, you can remember Janet.

She's very good at cows and poultry and all that, and her father often said she was the best cook in the Dale, but he was always blind fond of Janet. He had not her ill-temper and snappy ways to put up with in the house as I had. She was always sweet to him.'

'Then will ye live by yersel', Mrs. Harden?' asked Mrs. Gray, more for the sake of something to say than out of any interest in the matter.

'I'll go to Edinburgh to my cousin, Miss Wardlaw, in Howe Street, one of the Brunstane Wardlaws—very good family, but they haven't come much about me since I came to Listonshiels; you see it was rather a downcome for a Wardlaw to marry a plain hill-farmer, and I doubt they'll say I've gotten only my deserts.'

At this Mistress Gray got up to her feet. She had come to speak a word of comfort to a new-made widow in her hour of need, and lo, her words were neither appreciated nor her sympathy desired.

'Must you go already?' said Mrs. Harden, in her prim, well-bred way. 'I hope Mr. Gray will come to the funeral. It will be at Gairbrig, tell him, and I'll keep a seat in one of the coaches

for him. No, none of the Hardens have been buried in Faulds, and I'm just as glad. Oh, before you go, tell me what you think of the new crepe cloth for widows' dresses. I've got some patterns here. It'll wear better than all crepe. And do you think I should have streamers to my caps or not?'

'Deed, I hae but little skill in sic maitters, Mrs. Harden,' replied Lisbeth Gray, and her mouth was set in a long, stern curve. 'Guid-day to ye. I wish ye weel.'

They shook hands in the same limp way, and Lisbeth Gray closed the room-door with a long breath of relief. She was not surprised to see Janet on the stairs, and when she beckoned to her, joined her at once.

'You'd like to see him, wouldn't you?' she asked, in a faint whisper, and for answer Mrs. Gray put her arm round the girl's waist. So they entered the room together. The mistress of Stanerigg had known Matthew Harden well, and respected him greatly as a plain, straightforward, hard-working man. Tears stood in her eyes as she looked on the rigid white face, which bore no trace of the mental anguish which must rend

those who seek death by their own hand. It was as if his soul anguish had transferred itself to his daughter's face, which was white, and in her eyes a dumb, unspeakable terror.

‘Oh, Mistress Gray, it was a terrible thing! My poor father! You are a good woman. Folks say ye live very near to Heaven. Can you tell me, will he be lost for ever because of what he did, and shall I never see him again?’

‘Kneel down here wi’ me, lassie, an’ we’ll cry to the Lord thegither,’ said Mistress Gray, and the words of that prayer long lingered in the heart of Janet Harden, and when she rose from her knees she could believe that God was a God of mercy rather than of judgment; and so some peace returned to her riven heart. Thus Lisbeth Gray’s visit to Listonshiels had not been in vain.

‘Eh, father, the puir silly peacock,’ she said, as they drove out to the road. ‘She’s mair ta’en up wi’ her claes an’ the strings o’ her keps than her man. I’m wae for that lassie Janet. She’s waur off than if she hadna a mither ava.’

These were the palmy days of agriculture in the Dale, and it was not likely that a desirable farm like Listonshiels would go long a-begging

for a tenant. There was a lot of folk looking after it, and the air was thick with rumours for a while. Jamie Haldane did not seem to hanker after it, though he could have had it for the asking ; but at last, about September, the matter was settled, and one John Macqueen from the upper ward of Lanarkshire succeeded Matthew Harden in Listonshiels. Great was the speculation concerning him and his concerns before he came. But the only thing that could be found out about him was that he was very rich, and unmarried, which set all the maids in the Dale by the ears. One afternoon in October Mrs. Gray was sitting at the dining-room window waiting for her husband to come home to tea. The harvest was all in, after a very wet and broken season, and they had begun to lift the potatoes, which were ravaged by disease. It had been a poor year throughout for farmers, and there was more than the usual amount of grumbling at kirk and market, and they rolled the word 'puir's-hoose' like a sweet morsel under their tongues. Stanerigg was not a man who grumbled much, though he liked as little as most men to lose money, or to see his good

crops going to ruin. He bore these crosses grimly, and had no patience with the loud-mouthed lamentations of his brethren, whom he sometimes characterised as 'bletherin' skates.' Lisbeth Gray herself was never troubled about anything connected with weather or crops. She had lived a long life as farmer's daughter and farmer's wife, and had never seen seedtime or harvest fail. Yet it had vexed her a little, when her husband sent up from the field a creel of potatoes at dinner-time, to find two-thirds of them diseased.

As she sat, her reverie was disturbed by the roll of approaching wheels, and presently a wagonette swept round the avenue, driven by a man in buff livery, which she recognised as belonging to Listonshiels. Mrs. Harden was still there, and drove about the country-side just as she used to do, apparently anxious to make the most of what was left to her. In these driving expeditions she was very seldom accompanied by her daughter. On this occasion she was alone, and though Mrs. Gray was not particularly blithe to see her, she bade her a kindly welcome. She was struck by her exceedingly youthful appear-

ance as she came into the room. Her bonnet with its dainty white border was very becoming to her, and she was altogether a striking and interesting figure.

‘How do you do, Mrs. Gray?’ she said volubly. ‘I quite thought this would have been my p.p.c. visit to you.’

‘What’s that?’ asked Lisbeth Gray bluntly.

‘Why, my farewell visit; but something has happened to change my plans, and we’re not leaving Listonshiels at Martinmas.’

‘That’s queer. Is Mr. Macqueen no’ comin’ to bide?’

‘Why, yes, but he’s a bachelor, and has no womenkind. He has been a lot about Listonshiels lately, and we’ve talked things over. He’s going to buy all my furniture, and he wants me to keep house for him all winter—me and Janet. So I’ve written my cousin, Susan Wardlaw, that I won’t be till the spring, anyhow. Don’t you think it a good arrangement?’

‘It may turn out well, Mrs. Harden, but it sounds queer. No’ but what I think he’ll be well aff wi’ Janet to see to things. Is she quite pleased?’

‘I’ve never asked her. Beggars can’t be

choosers, my dear Mrs. Gray, and it will give us time to think and look about us. He's a splendid man, Mr. Macqueen, a perfect gentleman, as different from Dale farmers as day from night. It is a pleasure to speak to him. Has Mr. Gray seen him yet?'

'Only at the roup last week,' answered Mrs. Gray simply, but did not further gratify her visitor's curiosity. As a matter of fact, Stanerigg had been favourably impressed by the new tenant of Listonshiels, and had spoken highly of him to his wife. That visit and the general demeanour of Mrs. Harden left a queer and disagreeable impression on Mrs. Gray's mind, which did not disappear as time went on, nor was she so much astonished as most folks at the subsequent course of events. It was considered a very queer arrangement by most Dale folks, but the general opinion seemed to be that John Macqueen was a man who knew his own affairs best, and who would not suffer any interference therewith. Almost before the potatoes were lifted winter came on, and there was more snow in the Dale before Christmas than had been seen for years. The last three weeks in December the roads were drifted six

feet deep from the north gate of Inneshall to Listonshiels, which was the limit of the parish. So there were fewer social comings and goings than usual during the winter season in the Dale. The severe weather lasted well into the new year, and it was the last week in February before a right thaw set in. But there was no doubt about it when it did come; the air was as soft and balmy as at Midsummer, the sky soft with dappled clouds, and the roads running water from one end of the Dale to the other.

One afternoon when the thaw was about three days old, Janet Harden walked into Stanerigg, tired and wet, having come every foot of the way from Listonshiels, five good miles by the road. Mrs. Gray was unfeignedly glad to see her. She had cast many a thought to the lonely, unloved girl Matthew Harden had left behind, and had often wondered how the odd menage was progressing. After the girl had been in the house for a few minutes, and they were busy in their neighbourly talk, Lisbeth Gray thought she noticed a change in her. There was a restlessness in her demeanour which indicated some uneasiness of mind.

‘I needn’t pretend I’ve come to make an ordinary visit, Mrs. Gray, because I haven’t,’ she said presently, with a good deal of bluntness. ‘I want your advice. I must get away from Listonshiels. I can’t bide it any longer.’

‘What, is Mr. Macqueen not kind to you?’

‘Him, kind? Oh yes; he couldn’t be ill to anybody,’ she replied, and her face flushed a little. ‘I wish he were less kind, but it’s other things. My mother—oh, Mrs. Gray, I think shame to say it, and my poor father not six months in his grave—but I’m nearly sure my mother thinks of marrying Mr. Macqueen.’

‘An’ he her?’ asked Mrs. Gray significantly.

‘I suppose so. Mother thinks it, anyway; and I’m not fit to stand by and see it. Do you know of anybody who wants a housekeeper? I’m not afraid to work, as you ken, but get away from Listonshiels I must, and that speedily.’

‘I feel for ye, lassie, an’ a place shall be found for ye,’ replied Mrs. Gray quietly. ‘Then your mother will go to Edinburgh, I suppose, for even if they be to marry they’ll hae to wait oot the year. But he’s no near so auld as her, an’ the difference is on the wrong side.’

'He's forty-six, and mother is fifty-one,' replied Janet Harden. 'But you know yourself how young she looks, especially now she has laid away her caps.'

Mrs. Gray gave a little jerk of her head, which expressed a good deal.

'Mother's at Edinburgh to-day. She often goes in on Wednesday when Mr. Macqueen goes, so I thought I'd come over here. I left word that they needn't worry if I stopped here all night, Will you let me stop? I want so awfully to be beside you for a while.'

'Ay lass, ye can bide, an' welcome, as long as ye like,' replied Mrs. Gray, with a little shake in her voice. 'Had the Lord seen fit to gie me Janet Harden for a dochter, I wad hae been a prood woman. But I hae her for my frien', which is next best.'

It was the word in season, the cup of cold water that thirsty soul required. She was so set aside, so continually repressed in her own home, that she had lost confidence and pride in herself. They were still talking when the gig which had gone to fetch the master from Edinburgh market drove up to the door. And he had some-

body with him—an unexpected but welcome guest.

‘Mr. Macqueen, Lisbeth,’ Stanerigg called in through the open door. ‘He wants to see the fowr-year-auld. But we’ll tak’ what ye can gie us to eat first.’

Behind Stanerigg entered the tenant of Listonshiels, a goodly presence, almost overshadowing Robert Gray, though he was a tall man, and broad as well. John Macqueen was in the prime of life, and the few grey hairs visible among his dark hair and tinging his beard did not seem to add anything to his years, but only gave a mellowing touch to his ruddy face. It was a good face, frank, open, kindly, with honest eyes that had never feared to meet the gaze of any man. He gave a start when he saw Janet Harden sitting at the window, and then laughed.

‘It’s you, Miss Janet; your mother has just gone home in the wagonette. I came along to see a horse of Mr. Gray’s. I daresay he’ll set us home, though I intended to walk.’

‘She’s bidin’, my man, for a day or twa,’ put in Mrs. Gray drily. ‘Wull ye tak’ an egg to your tea?’

‘Yes, but what should she bide here for?’ he inquired, with a puzzled air.

‘She wants a change, as we a’ dae whiles,’ said Mrs. Gray, with an odd little smile on her face. There was a kind of joyousness in her very voice which seemed to be born of some happy thought. And indeed Lisbeth Gray had just made a great discovery.

She was particularly blithe and merry all tea-time; there had been many pleasant meals in that homely room, but none pleasanter than that, and it was quite dark before the men-folk went away out to the stable to see the four-year-old. Janet Harden did not stop that night at Stanerigg, as she had intended. She saw that Macqueen did not desire it, and when Mr. Gray offered them the little gig, to be sent back by a groom in the morning, she made no demur to accompanying him back to Listonshiels. When Mrs. Gray turned round from watching them drive away, she laughed out loud.

‘What are ye lauchin’ at, guidwife?’ inquired Stanerigg, in mild wonder.

‘At something that’s gaun to happen at Listonshiels,’ she replied, with a bonnie twinkle in her

kind eye. 'Them that lives langest 'll see maist.'

Nor would she be more explicit, though her husband asked her what 'ferlie she was spyin' noo.'

'What did Mrs. Gray mean by saying you wanted a change, Miss Janet?' inquired John Macqueen, before they had got beyond Stanerigg road-end. 'Are you not comfortable at Listonshiels?'

'I'd like a change,' she said in a low voice, and at her answer his face fell.

'You'll leave, then?'

'Yes, soon, I think,' she replied, truthfully. 'That's what I went to see Mrs. Gray for—to ask if she knew anybody that wanted a housekeeper.'

'I see. And you want to go immediately? What ails ye at Listonshiels?'

'Nothing,' she answered. 'I wish you wouldn't say any more about it.'

'Ye're no' ill at me, I hope? Have I failed in my duty to you?'

'No,' she replied briefly, and her face grew bitter in the darkness, and though he could not see it, he heard the inflexion of her voice.

‘There’s something the matter, Janet,’ he said, determinedly. ‘And I’ll be at the bottom of it. It’ll be a very ill day for me if ye leave Listonshiels. Who needs a housekeeper waur nor me?’

She answered nothing, for something kept her from saying that her mother would be left.

‘I’ve been thinking for a while back that we might mak’ a new arrangement, but I was feared to speak, no’ kennin’ what turn ye micht tak’. Janet, ye winna leave me an’ Listonshiels; ye are part o’ the place. Will ye be its mistress?’

She gave a little cry, and trembled greatly.

‘Ye are makin’ fun o’ me, Mr. Macqueen; let me down to walk back to Stanerigg.’

‘I’ll drive ye back when ye have answered my question, Janet,’ he said, and he stopped the horse as he spoke. They were in a space of the road clear from trees, and the bright young moon was out, so that the light fell full on their faces, showing his pale with agitation, yet full of a grave determination.

‘Do I understand ye?’ she said, piteously. ‘What is it ye are asking?’

‘I’m seekin’ ye for my wife, Janet. Ye must hae guessed that I’ve learned to care for ye as

few men care for a woman, maybe because I am auld. It's that that's keepit me frae speakin' oot till now, but if ye'll no hae me, I'll no' bide in Listonshiels another year.'

Janet Harden sat round in the gig and looked at him. He long remembered that look, its mingled pathos and keenness. It gave him a glimpse of a woman's heart.

'I'll bide,' she said, and the sob with which the words were spoken was stifled against his breast. It was an odd wooing, and Stanerigg's grey mare showed great patience and discretion, standing quietly as she did for ten minutes and more.

So that is how the present mistress of Listonshiels was wooed and won. There is always a flaw in the marble, and no rose without its thorn. It was not to be wondered at that Mrs. Harden made it as disagreeable for the lovers as was possible, for she had herself expected to become Mrs. Macqueen, and had made no secret of it. She does not come out much to Listonshiels, even now she is a grandmother, and in a certain house in Howe Street of Edinburgh there are two very cantankerous old women living together, who sometimes fall out and call each other by spiteful

names, such as would make the pious Wardlaws of Brunstane turn in their graves. But their bickerings fortunately do not mar the peace of the happy household at Listonshiels.

NOT DIVIDED

‘There’s nae sorrow there,
In the land o’ *the leal*.’

NOT DIVIDED

ONE by one Dale folks began to notice how Mrs. Gray, of Stanerigg, had begun to fail. The change was gradual, and was observed more particularly, of course, by those who only saw her at intervals. Those of her own household were the last of all to see anything amiss. She had led such an active, busy, bustling life, in the very forefront of her own domestic affairs always, and grudging neither time, labour, nor money to help others, that nobody could picture Stanerigg, or indeed the Dale itself, without her. She was conscious of growing weakness and weariness a long time before she spoke of it, or even admitted it to herself. She was not old as years go, only five-and-fifty; but she had always been a hard worker and a very early riser, thinking nothing of setting foot in her own dairy or kitchen by half-past five in the morning. And in all the years of

his married life Stanerigg had never eaten his breakfast alone, except during the brief and, to him, dreich fortnight his wife was up-stairs when Bob was born. When she began to steal an hour from the morning and to be glad to lie down in the afternoon instead of taking her forty winks in her easy-chair, she tried to think it was only age creeping upon her, and that she must be resigned to the fact that she was not so young as she had been. But as time went on there were other signs and symptoms that troubled her, and caused her many an anxious hour. While she was going through that period of suspense and foreboding, longing and yet fearing to know the worst, how she missed her old friend and wise counsellor, Doctor Gourlay, was known only to herself. To him she could have opened out her heart and laid bare all its secret fears. She did not consult the new doctor, though she felt friendly towards him, and heard him spoken well of. But the day came when she knew something must be done, and that speedily. It was the month of April, and the greatest activity prevailed outdoors on all the farms. The sowers were everywhere, and all were congratulating each other on the fine, dry seed-

time that had surprisingly supervened on a cold, wet, and unusually bitter spring.

Stanerigg came in late for his tea one night, looking well pleased, for he had gotten the heavy end of his work done, and well done too. He was surprised to see his wife lying on the sofa when he entered the dining-room, and he stood silently in the doorway contemplating her with a certain blank concern that spoke volumes.

‘Are ye no weel, Lisbeth?’ he asked, his tone sharp with the fierceness of the anxiety that smote him suddenly like a two-edged sword. For he seemed to see all in a moment some subtle change in the face that had been his beacon light for over thirty years, a certain sharpness of feature, a wanness of colour, a weariness of the eyes, which told of inward weakness or pain.

‘No, I’m no weel, faither; shut the door, my man, an’ come an’ sit doon—here by me.’

He obeyed her silently, and the pathos of the picture was indescribable. She held out her hand to him and laid it on his, which was brown and hard and rough, but still the true hand that had never failed her through all these thirty years. Her heart was wae for him as she looked upon

his troubled face, and on his grey hairs, which indicated the approaching age which might soon be rendered desolate. Yes, soon. Lisbeth Gray had already faced that possibility, and it had no terrors for her, save this of leaving the husband of her youth.

'I havena been weel this long time, faither,' she began, fixing him with her sweet, steadfast eyes. 'I thocht maybe it was just that I am gettin' auld, but noo I fear me it is something else.'

'What?' he asked, and his voice sounded strangely even to himself.

She put her hand to her side, and pressed it gradually downwards.

'There's something here. I dinna ken what, but I'd better see somebody. I think I'll go to Mrs. Denham's the morn, an' get her to tak' me to a doctor in Edinburgh.'

'Could we no gang the nicht?' he asked, and she smiled upon him with something of the arch sweetness of long ago.

'Eh, isn't that like a man! The great doctors dinna see folk at nicht, faither; ye've to wait their time. I'll gang by the nine train in the mornin', if ye like; an' dinna you worry, my man;

I've keepit it frae ye as long as I could, but it's time we saw aboot it now.'

He rose up suddenly from her side and strode to the window, upon which the sweet April sunshine smiled benignly; the sun that had seemed like a benediction to him as he strode the spring fields, but which now half mocked his misery.

'Lisbeth,' he said hoarsely, 'ye dinna think ye are terrible bad, serious-like, d'ye?'

'I dinna ken, my man. I am in the Lord's hands,' she replied, serenely. 'Here's Ailie wi' the tea.'

She raised herself from the sofa, but not without an effort, and a slight contraction of her brows, that seemed to indicate some hidden pang.

So far as Stanerigg was concerned, the evening meal might as well have been unprepared, so little did he eat, and that night, when his wife slept sweetly by his side, he never closed an eye. The silent watches were indeed spent by him in prayer—in fierce wrestling with the Lord for the dear life which something told him was in dire jeopardy. She was past all that; she had had her sad, sweet hours of communion with the Unseen, and now He gave His beloved sleep. Next morning

Stanerigg got out his best clothes from the bottom drawer, and a clean white shirt.

'Are you gaun, faither?' she asked. 'There's nae needcessity when I can get Mary at Edinburgh; an' ye ken ye were to begin the plantin' the day on the Bourick. I could tak' Ailie for that pairt, if I needit company.'

He did not speak for a minute, but gave her a look she understood.

'I wonder to hear ye, woman,' he said, about ten minutes after, pausing as he shaved clean his chin. 'There's nae Bourick for me the day, an' brawly do ye ken it, but I suppose ye maun aye be sayin' something.'

She laughed at his quick speech, and he regarded her with a kind of wondering reproach.

'Weel, women are queer,' he said. 'I've aye heard it, but noo I ken it.'

But she only laughed again, and somehow the sound parted the gloom that shut in his heart. His reasoning was that she could not be so terrible bad if she could laugh like that.

They drove down to the station in the still and exquisite morning sunshine, talking of farming and weather prospects and other commonplace

things, though the same thought was in the mind of each. What aspect would the world bear to them when they should return a few hours later? For one, at least, mayhap the sun would seem to have set for evermore.

‘If ye dinna mind, faither,’ she said to him in the train, when they had the carriage to themselves, ‘we’ll no fash Mary so early in the day. As you are wi’ me, I’d rather go mysel’, an’ we can gang doon efter we’ve seen the doctor.’

‘But I thocht ye said she wad tell ye wha to gang till?’ he asked, perplexedly. ‘Besides, I telegraphed her to meet us at the train.’

‘Oh, did ye? that was very thochtfu,’ she said, quickly and gratefully. ‘I’m gled ye cam’ instead o’ plantin’ the Bourick, efter a’. I daursay they’ll get them in withoot you.’

‘They’ll need to mak’ a set at it, onyhoo,’ he answered, and they were silent again, while the train sped through the open country, which was rejoicing in the new life and gladness of the spring. When they arrived at the Waverley Station, Mr. and Mrs. Denham awaited their arrival, both looking anxiously concerned. That useful and happy pair having obtained a needed glimpse of the

appreciation in which they were held, now pursued their busy life with contentment and profit, and the new charge was not less dear than the old. But they had a warm corner in their hearts for the simpler folk among whom their earlier lot had been cast; and no new friends had as yet supplanted in their esteem the kindly couple at Stanerigg.

'It's dear Lizzie, Neil,' said Mrs. Denham, the moment she caught sight of them alighting from the train. 'She isn't well. Don't you see a change in her since New Year?'

The minister nodded, and they hastened forward to greet their old friends.

'Oh, there ye are, Mary,' said Mrs. Gray, and her wan smile had lost none of its sweetness. 'It's guid to see ye. Ye wad be surprised to get Robert's telegram?'

'Yes, what is it? Your health, Lizzie dear? am I right?'

Mrs. Gray nodded.

'Walk on wi' the minister, faither, while I speak to Mary,' she replied, and before they had slowly traversed the long platform Mrs. Denham was in possession of the facts and knew what to do.

'We'll go to Professor Swanson. We'll just

catch him before he goes to the University. Will Mr. Gray come too?’

‘We’ll all go,’ said Mr. Denham, and, opening a cab door, helped them in. The Professor’s carriage was at his door, but he was willing to see them before going out.

Neil Denham and Stanerigg remained together in the dining-room while the two women entered the consulting-room where so often had been settled the issues of life and death. He did not keep them a great while, and it seemed to Mary Denham that he had ominously little to say.

‘If your husband is here, I will see him while you dress,’ he said, and with a grave, kind look, left them, and proceeded to the dining-room. Neil Denham he knew well, and when he was introduced to Robert Gray he shook hands with him with a certain grave pity in his eyes.

‘Weel, what have you to say about my wife, Professor?’ said the farmer at once.

‘I cannot give you much heart, I regret to say. The mischief is serious, and unfortunately beyond the reach of operation. There is a limit set to her life.’

No thought of seeking to hide or even gloss the

truth suggested itself to him. These were people to whom fair, straight dealing was as the breath of life ; nothing less or more would satisfy them.

Stanerigg scarcely flinched as he received his death-blow, but the doctor's practised eye detected a quick whitening of the lips and a scarcely perceptible contraction of the eyes.

‘Ye can dae naething?’

‘Nothing, my dear sir ; I wish I could.’

‘Had we kent to come earlier, could onything hae been dune?’ he asked then, as if determined to know the worst.

The doctor shook his head.

‘No, the seat of the disease is unapproachable. You may have no regrets or misgivings on that particular point. I would not deceive you regarding it.’

‘An’ hoo long?’ he asked, and the words fell from his dry lips with a slight pause between each.

‘About six months, certainly not longer. I will be glad to come, if need be, to see her again. There are some things we can do to alleviate when we cannot cure. A line or a message from Mr. Denham will suffice at any time. Mēanwhile God comfort you and yours in this heavy trial.’

The door opened, and the two women came in. Mrs. Gray looked white and exhausted. The Professor rang the bell and ordered a glass of wine. Stanerigg moved to his wife's side, and put his arm round her, laying aside the reserve that had bound him these thirty years.

'Oh, Lisbeth,' he said, and those who heard him never forgot the concentrated anguish in his tones : 'My wife!'

My wife! If he could have kept her, if his love could have saved her a single pang! It was all expressed in these four words.

The Professor bade them good-bye silently, and went his way more saddened than usual at the outset of his day's work. Neil Denham stood in the window looking beyond the budding trees of the garden down to the sunny Forth, and his eyes were wet.

Mary took the wine-glass from the servant's hand and held it to the lips of her friend, and gradually the faint colour stole back to her face.

'Sic a bother I am to a' body,' she said, smiling bravely. 'I suppose we'd better gang noo. D'ye no think, faither, we should gang straicht hame at one o'clock?'

‘Not if I know it,’ put in Mrs. Denham quickly ; ‘ye’ll come down and have a bit of dinner with us and a rest all afternoon ; then, after a cup of tea, you can go at five. Am I not right, Mr. Gray ? Lizzie needs a rest after all this.’

‘Yes, yes ; dae what you think best. She needs rest.’

The man was so stricken, he had hardly control of his thoughts. Two words were searing themselves into his brain and heart to the exclusion of all else. Six months ! In six months he would be alone, wifeless and childless in the place she had consecrated by the benediction of her presence.

‘The cab is at the door yet, Mary,’ said the minister, gently. ‘If you are ready we had better go.’

They drove slowly down to the comfortable, cheery house, and Lisbeth Gray made no demur when they made her lie down on the sofa. The long struggle was over ; she had laid down her arms, and it was sweet to rest. But it discomposed her greatly to look at her husband’s face, and to read there that his struggle was but commencing. For his sake she wished they were at home ; in the months to come there would be

time for communion, for sacred talk which might make the thought of the coming parting familiar at least, if not endurable. Knowing him as she did, she discerned his soul-torture, and that the will of God was hateful and awful to him as yet. While she, most composed of all, slept that afternoon, Denham and his old friend took a walk down towards the sea, though they talked but little. Denham was not a man to weary with words; his delicate discernment warned him when these were best withheld; neither did he mock him with platitudes about resignation and all things working together for good. He knew that the finger of God would yet be laid in healing on that strong, tender, riven heart, but that it must pass through its Gethsemane first. Yet was his silent companionship, by reason of its very reticence, fraught with unspeakable comfort, and when they came again to the door, Stanerigg held out his hand.

‘I feel better, thank ye, Maister Denham.’

‘You will be better, friend, when God Himself speaks again,’ he replied, as he gripped the proffered hand. ‘All will be well—is well, even now, with you and her.’

In the sweet spring dusk they returned again to the home where they had dwelt, with no shadow between them, for two-and-thirty years. And as they stood on the doorstep a moment, the same thought occurred to each, that to-morrow was the anniversary of their marriage day.

'We've been spared thegither twa-an'-thirty year, Robert,' she said, with a solemn, sweet smile. 'Surely noo we can say, His will be done; an' ye are wearin' auld, too, my man; ye'll sune come efter me.'

'If I could but gang afore ye, wife, it wad mak me blithe,' he answered, and, unable to bear more, threw open the door. That night life seemed a dark and a fearsome thing to Robert Gray, and his strong faith, which had never been assailed, shook at its very foundations. Wild rebellions, fierce, intolerable questionings rent his soul, and the night hours witnessed a conflict which left him weary and spent. Yet peace was not denied him. It was impossible to be bitter or rebellious long beside the sweetness which breathed from his wife's heart, stayed and rested as she was upon the Unseen in a manner most marvellous to behold. Now that suspense was over, and that

there was no need to hide or to dissemble, she seemed most utterly and exquisitely at peace. She could not even be sad, and as they said but little at first, it was a long time before anybody knew of her serious and hopeless state. She grew weaker gradually, so that there was no violent wrench; things were given up one by one; little by little she was weaned away from earth and earthly things. She was able to see and even to enjoy the glory of an exceptionally full and lovely summer, and all the fields were ripe for the sickle, some of them reaped indeed, before she went up-stairs for the last time. The Denhams took their holidays in September, and both came to Stanerigg, where they abode all the time. When his leave was up, the minister returned to town alone, it being tacitly understood that his wife should remain to the end. She was needed now, for there were days of sore pain and weariness in the darkened room, days that made Mary Denham pray that the end might be hastened. But these passed, and just before the end there was a period of lovely and indescribable peace, of absolute respite from pain, a kind of Indian summer that comforted them all. Of

Stanerigg himself I have not the heart to write, since what pen dare seek to describe his anguish, or to enter into the sweet and secret pain of the communion permitted in that hallowed room? Mary Denham knew, of course, in what esteem her friend was held in the Dale, but the extent and depth of the devotion and love she had won was an amazing thing to have witnessed and proved.

All day long, towards the end, the stream of inquirers came to the door of Stanerigg. From far and near they came, gentle and simple, little bairns and hoary men, to whom, in her own quiet way, she had given the cup of cold water, tired mothers and perplexed maidens to whom she had been a mother in Israel.

‘Oh, Lizzie,’ her friend cried one day, ‘that’s David Cargill, and Curly Pow, and they’re away greeting both of them, and Westerlaw was at the door an hour ago and couldn’t speak, and I think I see the Pitbraden carriage on the brae now ; and they send a message from Inneshall every day. Will ye leave me your secret, my woman, the secret that’s giving you such a triumphant journey home? Whiles—ay, very often—I envy you more than you think.’

‘There’s nae secret, Mary,’ she replied. ‘Be kind to a’body an’ lippen a lot.’

Then the dying woman smiled and closed her eyes, well pleased by these tokens of love, yet weaned from them too, and already almost a citizen of heaven. There were some she liked to see, and nobody who entered that room left it saddened or depressed, for it was lit by the sunshine from beyond. It was given to her to show to some worldly and shrinking souls that it may even be sweet to die.

She fell with the leaf in October—on a wild and stormy morning when the wind tore sobbing through the trees; in the fierce red dawning of a day which made great sorrow on the sea. But the tumult without did not disturb her in her passing, and the watchers by that dying bed were conscious only of a great, ineffable peace. They were not many. Her husband knelt by her pillow, Neil and Mary Denham stood at the foot of the bed, while the faithful Ailie stood sadly within the door, tearless, but looking as if the light of her life had gone out. Suddenly Lisbeth Gray opened her closed eyes, and there came upon her face a great radiance.

‘Oh, my laddie!—d’ye no see him, faither my son, my son!’

So the mother and her boy met again; and he who was bereft bowed his head on the pillow and prayed that he too might be taken, since life no longer held anything worthy in his sight. They left him for a little space alone with his dead, and when they came again he was still in the same attitude, and had apparently never moved. His wife’s dead hand lay upon his grey hair.

Mary Denham went to him softly and touched his shoulder. Something in the rigid stillness clutched at her heart, and she cried to Ailie to bring Mr. Denham. ‘Neil, Neil, there is something wrong here. I believe his heart is broken!’

It was even so.

‘They were lovely and pleasant in their lives,’ said Denham, when he was able to speak, ‘and in death they are not divided.’



